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award

Screen and OUP would like to congratulate Mark Langer whose
article 'The Disney-Fleischer dilemma: product differentiation and
technological innovation' from *Screen*, vol. 33, no. 4 (1992) was
recently awarded the National Film Board of Canada Norman
McLaren/Evelyn Lambert Award for Best Scholarly Article Written
on Animation (1992–3).

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Glasgow, 30 June - 2 July 1995

This year the conference will focus on issues of **performance** and **music** and will overlap with the biennial conference of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music, which is to be organized around the topic of *Music on Show* and will run 1 - 6 July.

2 July will be a joint day with IASPM on
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Framing experience: case studies in the reception of *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*

JULIA HALLAM AND MARGARET MARSHMENT

I've always thought of the world as being this thing that you construct in between the four sides of a box.

Beeban Kidron, director of *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*¹

I know it's only fiction, but these things are happening somewhere.

Viewer of *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*

Jeanette Winterson's adaptation of her own novel for television was a rare event in the history of British television drama. Not only was it the first production to be written and made by a female creative team, but its themes dealt with the controversial topics of lesbianism and religious fundamentalism. *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* (BBC, 1990) tells the story of Jess, a young girl growing up in a strict fundamentalist Christian household in a northern industrial town. At the age of sixteen she falls in love with Melanie, a girl of about the same age. This relationship is brutally destroyed by her mother and other members of the evangelical community. Following a second (less traumatic) lesbian relationship, Jess, refusing to renounce her sexuality, leaves church and home, eventually to go to university at Oxford.

Originally written for a small, woman-identified readership, Winterson's novel is formally innovative in the telling of its story, interweaving biographical detail with fairy tales and biblical fables. It won the Whitbread prize in 1985, and came to the attention of

¹ *Moving Pictures*. BBC2, 12 March 1993.

- 2 Until relatively recently, 'quality' drama has been the only television drama form to attract serious critical attention in Britain. Originally, single plays by known dramatists (in the 1960s and 1970s series such as *Armchair Theatre* and *Play for Today*) presented serious and provocative subject matter that was often formally innovative. In recent years, the term has more typically been used to describe a serial adaptation of a work of 'literary' stature, characterized by 'high production values'. See, for example the discussion in Charlotte Brunsdon, 'Problems of quality', *Screen*, vol. 31, no. 1 (1990), pp. 67–90.
- 3 The notorious Clause 28, forbidding local government funding for projects 'promoting homosexuality', had created a climate of fear around the issue in the period while *Oranges* was being produced.
- 4 Hilary Hinds, 'Oranges are Not the Only Fruit: reaching audiences other lesbian texts cannot reach' in Sally Munt (ed.), *New Lesbian Criticism: Literary and Cultural Readings* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 158–63.
- 5 Margaret Marshment and Julia Hallam, 'Oranges are Not the Only Fruit: string of knots to orange box', *Jump Cut*, no. 39 (1994) pp. 39–49. A version of this article can also be found in Belinda Budge and Diane Hamer (eds), *The Good, the Bad and the Gorgeous* (London and New York: Pandora, 1994) pp. 142–65.

Phillipa Giles, a BBC2 script editor and commissioner. Some two years later, with Giles as producer, Winterson as scriptwriter, Beeban Kidron directing, Cecilia Brereton as designer and Rachel Portman composing the score, the novel was adapted for network television. The three-part drama was shown on consecutive days in prime time in January 1990 and repeated in the summer; the viewing audience on both occasions approached six million.

Advance publicity flagged the series as 'quality' drama because of its literary pedigree, contentious subject matter and scheduling on BBC2.² In a study of the press treatment of the screening of *Oranges*, Hilary Hinds notes that while the tabloid press sensationalized the 'explicit' treatment of lesbian sexuality, reviews in the liberal press decentred lesbianism. These either focused on the portrayal of the evangelical sect and, in the context of both Section 28 and the Rushdie affair, discussed Winterson's right as an artist to represent lesbianism and religion 'blasphemously'³ or they articulated lesbianism to what are seen as more 'universalizing' discourses such as 'religion, the family, or simply growing up',⁴ which, while not ignoring lesbian experience does deny its specificity.

Our own textual analysis of the television version of *Oranges* had convinced us that its makers had very consciously adopted a strategy that would ensure a supportive response to the issue of lesbian identity.⁵ Playing off the representation of one unpopular minority position (religious fundamentalism) against another (lesbianism), they aimed to secure a reading in sympathy with the protagonist Jess and her predicament rather than with the fundamentalist sect who persecute her. If we were right, then viewers who accepted this preferred reading would be accepting a definition of lesbianism directly counter to dominant ideological positions concerning 'normal' sexuality. We could not know, of course, that this was how viewers had understood the text. We argued that *Oranges* was tightly constructed to close down its polysemy in favour of this one reading, but such closure was not complete and alternative readings were possible. In addition, even if viewers did accept this as the text's meaning, we could not know to what extent they would resist its representation of lesbianism as 'normal'.

It was at this point in our textual study that we decided to ask other women to watch the drama with us and find out what they thought. We conducted a series of in depth viewings of the text with a small number of women. On a fairly *ad hoc* basis, but avoiding close friends and professionals in the field, we approached eight women from among our daily contacts (for example a neighbour, the mother of a child's friend, a friend of a friend), all of whom accepted enthusiastically. We were not concerned with selecting a representative sample, or trying to select women on the basis of certain known characteristics. We told them only that we were

researching responses to the programme, and asked what they remembered of their first viewing. Then we watched the three episodes of *Oranges* in full, over two or three evenings, with one (or in one case, two) of these 'close readers' at a time, noting their responses as we went and discussing them in considerable detail. These sessions were organized as informal occasions, including interruptions, refreshments and so on, so that their status as viewing contexts fell somewhere between the artificiality of 'laboratory' screenings and home viewing as leisure. Comments on the sessions ranged from saying how enjoyable they had been to wondering how 'TV will ever be the same again', so that while the close readers felt relaxed enough to laugh uproariously and/or share intimate details about their private lives, they were also aware of the formal nature of the viewings and that, for us, they had a specific purpose. Their efforts to analyze their own responses to the text, prompted by our questions about what was pleasurable/distressing and why that was so, form the basis of this analysis.

Working with a text which was clearly directed towards closure rather than polysemy, and one whose preferred reading was counter to dominant ideological constructions of marriage and heterosexuality, meant that we were not 'looking for' negotiated or resistant readings among the respondents. We approached the viewings with curiosity rather than preconceptions, but our feminist standpoint does need to be taken into account. We hoped to find that they did like it and did interpret it in line with the preferred reading because we shared Winterson's hope that, as television, it would 'help us to question what morality really means'⁶ and thus constitute a significant feminist, anti-homophobic intervention in popular culture. We also wanted to find out how these responses might compare to those from viewers who were asked what they remembered from the text some two years on. This would give us some idea of how *Oranges* had affected viewers, why they remembered what they did about it. Because we were interested in the nature of *Oranges*' intervention in debates on identity and representation, we wanted to find out if the formal strategies adopted by the production team had influenced viewer memory. We distributed a fairly brief, open-ended questionnaire among contacts of the eight close readers, and mature students on a women's studies course, asking in a very general way what they remembered of *Oranges*' transmission in 1990.⁷ We received thirty-two replies from a hundred questionnaires, with responses ranging from the telegraphic to near essays. Two of these respondents actively sought us out to discuss their reactions in more detail.

Clearly, this small sample precludes useful sociological categorization and, while we wanted to avoid an obviously homogenous group, neither did we set out to select a sample on the basis of sociological categories. We had neither the funds nor the

6 Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit: the Script* (London: Pandora, 1990), p. xvii.

7 The questionnaire consisted of a double-sided sheet. One side asked respondents to define themselves in relation to age, sexuality, marital status, motherhood, religion, class, region, ethnicity, feminism, political affiliation and 'anything else'. The other asked whether, and why, they had watched *Oranges*, what they remembered about it, what they thought it was about, what they had liked and disliked, and their overall response.

resources for such a project and it is doubtful whether such an approach would, in this case, have revealed more interesting results. While we found that the questionnaires usefully revealed the extent to which 'high production values' had influenced viewer memory, the more interesting analytical points emerged from discussions with the close readers. As it turned out, this small group included a range of positions across, for example, age, occupation, ethnicity, religion, marital status and sexual preference that was (especially including their personal histories) surprisingly broad. This in itself reveals a limitation of more rigorously controlled audience research: that people's different positionings cannot be neatly compartmentalized, but are composed of a complex of overlapping categorizations which can also change over time.

Analysis of the material generated by the questionnaire was based on dividing responses into comments on production and aesthetics, comments on theme and content and comments on emotional response. Some responses were not easily categorized in this way, so an additional analysis of keyword and keyphrase use was developed. We adopted a similar technique with the transcripts generated from close readings. As in much feminist research, judgements about categorization formed the ground of debate between us as feminist researchers and writers; decisions involved clarifying our own positions, which helped us to find ways to write up the material.

Focusing on a text written and produced by and for women enabled us to explore the meanings and possible pleasures it offered in relation both to the text's aesthetic and ideological characteristics and to viewers' experiences. We do not see our approach as replacing other approaches, but we hope it will raise interesting questions connected with sociological and ethnographic constructions of audiences, which can be pursued in feminist research into popular culture.

Sex and God

Winterson saw her work as an assault upon the values of some of society's key institutions: 'I know that *Oranges* challenges the virtues of the home, the power of the church and the supposed normality of heterosexuality'.⁸ We would argue that the television adaptation was constructed to do this by inviting a reading of lesbianism as a 'naturalized' sexuality. While the press reception suggests that this strategy was successful in the public sphere,⁹ in the responses from the close readers the issue of lesbianism was more foregrounded.

In discussing with a born-again Christian viewer her memories of the series, it transpired that she had not watched it all when it was transmitted, precisely because she saw it as 'holding up homosexuality as OK'. She had adhered strictly to the church's

⁸ Winterson, *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*: the Script, p. xvii.

⁹ Hinds, 'Oranges are Not the Only Fruit', p. 158.

teaching that homosexuality was a sin, and therefore ‘thought Jess was wrong’. She notes, ‘I still feel as a Christian that to practice homosexuality is wrong, but now I’m much more open’. She approached the text, therefore, consciously aiming to explore her responses to lesbianism in relation to her religious beliefs. In the event, she enjoyed *Oranges* enormously, for many of the reasons that all the readers did. She was, however, the one close reader to express an explicit awareness of how the text was constructed to persuade her that lesbianism was acceptable. She cited the sympathetic portrayal of Jess and the unsympathetic portrayal of the church members, especially the Pastor (‘a sod’), as being designed to ‘manipulate me into accepting her point of view’. This is close to Winterson’s own assessment of how some viewers might respond:

What will make people most angry is a feeling that they have been manipulated because it is very difficult *not* to be sympathetic with Jess. You want her to win out and it is very difficult to sympathise with the other side which is where most people would normally place themselves.¹⁰

But this viewer was *not* angry. She appeared to accept it as a legitimate textual strategy which, in presenting her with a powerful statement in favour of lesbianism, gave her food for thought in working out the details of her faith. Nor, whatever their experience of or attitudes towards lesbianism, were any of the other close readers angry. It did not seem that any of them had an automatic predisposition to ‘place themselves’ with ‘the other side’. On the contrary, as discussions about religion and Jess’s mother revealed, most had memories of church and family characterized by a pain of feeling oppressed which ran counter to, and outweighed, dominant ideological values around church and family. The text’s invitation to sympathize with Jess was therefore welcomed as an opportunity to recognize the shared nature of these experiences.

Two younger, heterosexual viewers (one black, one white) did not refer to Jess’s lesbianism as an issue at all. One, on being asked about it, expressed incredulity at homophobia: ‘When I was young [homosexuality] was a sin. But now when I think about being in love, you can’t distinguish. If it happens to be a man, or a woman, it makes no difference.’ Both lesbian viewers expressed pleasure at the positive portrayal of a lesbian protagonist and at being invited to share a lesbian narrative perspective. Both likened their own experiences to those of Jess, expressing no sense that these were untypical of lesbians in general: ‘They still treat us like that’, said one, and for the other the text revived painful memories of a similar teenage experience. Interestingly, one of these viewers was the only one to express reservations about Jess as a character: of the older Jess she said, ‘I sympathize with her position, but I don’t like her’. This, she thought, might be due to a biographical coincidence, but

¹⁰ Winterson, *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit: the Script*, p. xvii.

Jess (Charlotte Coleman) and
first girlfriend Melanie
(Catherine Bradshaw). Picture
© BBC.



said too that she found her 'manipulative', especially in the church 'seductions' of Melanie and Katy. This can be seen as a negative evaluation of Jess's self-possession and knowingness, which other viewers valued positively.

None of the respondents saw *Oranges* as being about religion. All the close readers had been brought up, with differing degrees of rigour, as Christians of various denominations, with most having more or less lapsed in their faith. The exception was the woman who defined herself as 'born again' evangelical, as did two of the questionnaire respondents. Although the three with experience of evangelical Christianity saw its treatment of the theme of evangelicism and sexuality as relating directly to conflicts in their own lives, they still, like the others, defined the work's principal theme as lying elsewhere. The portrayal of the evangelical church was, of course, seen as very important, but more as the particular context for Jess's struggle than as itself the subject of interest. In this sense, it represented in an extreme form the repressive authority of the adult world rather than a 'vengeful satire on Protestant fundamentalism'.¹¹ Viewers responded with a sense of outrage, but an outrage informed less by surprise than by recognition. Comments such as, 'I was really hit by the religion – I was brought up as a staunch Catholic', 'I can relate to that', 'The times I was told that!', alongside criticism of and jokes about religion in general, suggest that the evangelical sect as portrayed was not seen as entirely 'other'. In this respect, those who had been raised as Catholics appeared to identify with the critique of the sect more closely than non-Catholics.

All the respondents were very upset by the exorcism scene. The

11 James Saynor, 'Fruits and nutters', *The Listener* 18 January 1990, p. 6

12 While the pastor and Jess's mother do have names in the television version, they are almost never used. The published script identifies them as 'Pastor' and 'Mother'. When referring to them as characters we have adopted the capitalization but added the definite article to prevent a suggestion of mythicization. We do not capitalize when referring to their roles rather than to them as characters.

13 Hinds, 'Oranges are Not the Only Fruit', p. 163.

14 Saynor, 'Fruits and nutters'.

sect members, led by the Pastor and including the Mother,¹² forcibly hold Jess down, tie her up and gag her, in order to 'pray over' her for three days. This very painful scene shows Jess dressed in school uniform, including knee-length white socks. She looks, therefore, more like a child than a sexually active adolescent. The sect members appear morally repugnant: four adults grunting and panting as they terrorize a young girl. The participation of Jess's mother in the violence suggests the power of extremist ideologies to corrupt family relations. And the gargoyle-like distortions of Jess's face signifies the moral ugliness of the scene. Several close readers showed signs of real distress during the viewings; but no one questioned whether 'such things could happen'. This was also true of the evangelical Christians, who confirmed that 'such things did happen'. The overall response then, while including, like the press reviews, strong expressions of horror and amusement at the sect's obsessiveness, was less inclined to see it as representing a 'lunatic fringe'.¹³

After Jess, the most remembered character and the one who elicited even more comment, was the Mother. A third of the respondents defined *Oranges* as being about the relationship between Jess and her mother. The press reviews did not refer to this relationship as a theme of the work, nor single out the Mother for comment to a comparable degree; or when they did it was to present her simply as a kind of monster.¹⁴ The fascination of the Mother character is indeed her monstrousness, as all the close readers made clear. Exceptionally single-minded and energetic in pursuit of her rigid view of the world, she could be seen as the archetypal bigot. But the responses overall were surprisingly complex. None shared or approved of her attitudes. This included the evangelical viewer, who often referred to the Mother's actions as 'horrible', analyzing her in relation to her own and others' faith: 'She's portraying how she thinks a Christian should be – to earn God's approval you have to be quoting the bible, earning her way into heaven. She's very narrow, doesn't allow herself to think.'

This disapproval, however, coexisted with other responses. Almost no one doubted that, as one viewer put it, 'She really loves the kid'. The scene where she dresses Jess for her first day at school, warning her against its evils, came in for particular praise: 'Nice scene. There's a lot of love in the Mum.' 'She's giving out a feeling of security to the kid. Saying to the kid, "You're fine, you're OK".' 'She loves her, doesn't she? She loves her.' At such moments, viewers were clearly feeling considerable affection for the Mother. The perceived mix of contradictory qualities in her character gave rise to general comments about mother–daughter relationships in the light of viewers' own experiences, and here there was a significant difference between those who were themselves mothers and those who were not. All identified with Jess's experience of being on the

receiving end of adult power, and several perceived similarities between the Mother and their own mothers' autocratic style. They noted that in the opening scenes the camera represents Jess's point of view as a small child, making the Mother appear terrifying and cruel. It seemed that despite specific differences between Jess's childhood and their own there was a strong shared sense of children's powerlessness and, despite comments about her missing pleasures children should have (such as friends her own age), the painful memories of viewers' own childhoods that were evoked did not suggest that Jess's situation was perceived as very exceptional.

Most significant was what many identified as the example of strength which the Mother offers Jess in demonstrating possibilities for women to forge their own identities and live by their own principles. She was described as committed, competent, energetic; it was clear that viewers enjoyed her strength in these respects, even as they rejected the particular values she espoused. In some contexts they also enjoyed her (over-) confidence and dominance of all around her. This was evident in the laughter at, for example, her 'one-liners' which, far from being at her expense, came increasingly to be in sympathy with her irrepressible ability to impose her view upon the world. Importantly, the Mother was seen to have produced in Jess a similar strength of character enabling her to resolve to live by her own (lesbian) principles. 'We are called to be apart', says the Mother of their religious identity, and Jess accepts this 'apartness' rather than renounce her sexuality. This was widely appreciated by several of the close readers: 'She got into Oxford through her Mum. It was the women who had the power.' 'A really strong point of the film was that she did what she wanted to do with her life. Her Mum did that for her.' As one summed her up: 'She's such a compelling character, she's so overpowering and you should hate her, but she's such a survivor, she finds some way of seeking her own identity'.

Clearly, *Oranges* offered women very real and thought-provoking pleasures in its portrayal of strong women. In this sense, we would argue that it was enjoyed as a feminist text. There was little explicit discussion of feminism, although one viewer expressed pleasure at Elsie's revelation that she had been a suffragette – 'good to have a bit of politics'. But the unanimous pleasure expressed in the strength and determination of Jess as a character who 'did what she wanted to do with her life' and the ambivalent pleasure in the Mother's version of female power are clearly consonant with a western feminist view of women's autonomy. All the close readers were aware that *Oranges* had been written by a woman, and almost all commented at some point on how 'you could tell' and 'what a pleasure' it was.



Mother (Geraldine McEwan)
and Jess (Charlotte Coleman) –
'called to be apart'. Picture
© BBC.

Getting it right

Almost all the respondents had originally watched *Oranges* as a result of the advance publicity or word-of-mouth recommendation. Having had expectations of its subject-matter, it might be supposed that this would also constitute their memories of it. But this was only partly the case. In both the questionnaires and discussions with close readers, memories of *Oranges* were expressed in distinctly aesthetic terms.

Television is usually discussed in terms of its 'content' and only rarely considered for its aesthetic qualities, often being compared unfavourably with cinema in respect of its visual pleasures. This presumes that television is experienced in a less aesthetically significant way than most other media. 'Quality' drama is perhaps

15 Alan Bennett is a northern English writer, well known for his sharp observation and witty, satirical commentary; he has written a number of dramas for television.

16 Claire Messud, 'All for the love of film', *The Guardian*, 27 May 1992, p. 33.

the exception, having as a genre consistently received serious critical attention. But even this has tended to work within a literary tradition, with its quality status dependent on associations with the theatre and literature, and assumed to be 'script led' rather than 'camera led'. *Oranges* is no different from other quality drama in this respect, with careful attention paid to the detail of period settings, outstanding performances from its actors and a script that one viewer described as 'very Alan Bennett'.¹⁵ There was praise for the acting and characterization, for the humour, for its being 'well-written': in short, for what several respondents themselves referred to as its 'high production values'.

For most respondents their memories of *Oranges* were predominantly visual ones. They remembered individual scenes; not just the 'sex scene' and the exorcism (as one might expect), but also ones of less narrative or thematic importance, such as an early scene of the evangelicals on the beach. They also remembered specific shots, such as Jess and Mother on the hill overlooking the town, details like facial expressions and hair colour and the way the camera frequently showed women's hands. It was evident that the 'look' of the work outweighed narrative in how it was remembered. No one, for instance, referred to *Oranges* as a story, although there were references to it as a film, while several close readers described it as 'like a series of snapshots'. Kidron has said of her own filmic style that she thinks of 'everything as a still picture' and of Winterson's work, 'I have the pictures for her words', while Winterson said of Kidron, 'She has the right way of looking for my way of thinking'.¹⁶ This complementarity of vision between writer and director apparently worked for the viewers as well.

Another frequently remarked-upon pleasure of *Oranges* was the acting. The two characters that attracted most comment in this respect were Mother and Small Jess. The many opinions expressed on individual characters could have belonged to discourses about real people – 'She's a good sort', 'I like her', 'Poor William' – demonstrating a slide between relating to the text as a constructed fiction and as a representation of reality. The exceptions seem to draw on a rather different ground of interpretative activity. Because of her youth, viewers were conscious of the demands of Emily Aston's role in the first episode, and therefore of her as a – very young – actor performing for camera. At the same time, it was often difficult to tell where admiration for her acting ability ended and delight in her character began: comments like 'She's such a sweetie' could refer to either. Only one close reader felt she was too young to act convincingly and that this detracted from the episode's overall quality. The delight in the performance of the Mother was the reverse of this. Geraldine McEwan was known to most of the close readers from other television (and stage) performances and noted for her ability, in a theatrical tradition, to play a range of roles

unlike her 'real' self. Appreciation of her performance as performance was explicit, and clearly constituted an important element not only in viewers' pleasure in the high production values of the text, but also, we suspect, because they could separate actor from role, in their ability to enjoy the character of the Mother and feel affection for her. The contrast here with the Pastor was striking: he was universally loathed and never identified as 'acting a part'.

Finally, there was considerable praise for the 'realism' of *Oranges*. This ranged from appreciative comments on the accuracy of the interiors – 'Doesn't that take you back?', 'The tea in the church scene, very fifties feel' – to remarking on the believability of the characters – 'Real characters, you can really believe this gang'. These comments often led into anecdotes about places and people in viewers' own experience, sometimes lighthearted, but often quite intimate and painful. There was also, importantly, a general awareness (or assumption) that the narrative was based on the writer's own life. This did not amount to a naive belief in the work as documentary 'truth'. The praise for the realism is itself evidence of this awareness. But there was pleasure in a story which 'could be true', because, as one viewer put it, even when we 'know it's only fiction, these things are happening somewhere'. This might seem to explain viewers' ability to become emotionally involved in the drama while simultaneously remaining aware of its fictional status. Claiming identification with a character was usually confined to specific scenes or situations, and couched as an ability to do so – 'I can identify with that' – on the basis of a comparable real life experience.

All the close readers, in different terms, expressed pleasure in seeing women's experience presented on television with 'humour and sensitivity' and with a serious attention to detail that was pleasurable because it was 'true'. Issues of aesthetics and verisimilitude appeared, indeed, to be inextricably connected. Where the text was felt to fall short on criteria of 'truth to life' this was often expressed as an aesthetic judgment. Thus one viewer disliked the 'surreal' whiteness of the hospital scene because it was 'obviously faking it'. But another liked the credit sequences because they 'say all sorts of things without saying a word'. What is important, we feel, is that viewers simultaneously perceived the fiction as an artefact which could be judged by aesthetic criteria, and as a narrative whose relation to reality could be subjected to criteria of 'truth'.

The complexity with which the close readers responded to both the themes of the text and to its aesthetic, relating the fiction to experience, and both to the drama as a constructed representation, should alert us to the way in which audience studies focusing on particular issues may tend to produce an image of viewers as

somewhat 'single-minded' in their responses to texts. This may have the unintended effect of confirming academics in their prejudice that they understand what is going on in a text quite differently from the way 'ordinary' viewers understand it.

Ordinary women

A striking feature of the responses to *Oranges* was the frequency with which individual women recognized in it events, characters and situations closely resembling their own experience. The question of whether or not the content of realist fictions is really *like* 'real life' is usually bracketed in favour of discussions of the formal conventions that make it appear to be so. However, we would suggest that much academic discourse employs an implicit set of commonsense assumptions about the relationship between fiction and experience which are based in ideological conceptions of what constitutes 'ordinary life'. Thus it is assumed that while realism depends on producing a fictional world that *looks like* the 'real world', it will feature events and situations which are outside most people's everyday experience. Viewers are presumed to be interested in fiction precisely because it is 'larger than life' (more dramatic, more perfect, more dreadful) and to identify with it not because it resembles their own experience, but because the text positions them to do so.

Oranges was widely reviewed as a work dealing with very exceptional, even peculiar, people and it is not difficult to describe it as such: a sexually 'deviant' heroine, adopted by an obsessively religious mother, indoctrinated into an 'extremist' sect, surrounded by eccentric older women, a stentorian pastor and a silent father. Yet the text begins with a claim for Jess's ordinariness: 'Like most people, I grew up with my mother and father'. And the *mise-en-scène* lovingly insisting on the small northern town of steep cobbled terraces and cramped interiors, with more than an echo of new wave British cinema, confirms her claim: to be working class and northern is, after all, to be *very* ordinary.

The close readers agreed. The widespread praise for the text's realism, for its having 'got it right' in terms of appearance, dialogue and characterization, was not, it seemed, only an aesthetic judgment; it was also praise for its having 'got it right' in relation to what they knew of the world. All the close readers, and some questionnaire respondents, mentioned important ways in which the text depicted characters, events and situations close to their own experience. These included some very detailed similarities: two born-again Christian viewers saw the text as engaging with conflicts they were experiencing between the church's teaching on homosexuality and their own lives; another woman told us she had

been raised by an evangelical father 'exactly like the pastor'; yet another that in a northern town in the 1950s her teenage lesbian relationship had been forcibly destroyed by her partner's family and their parish priest.

Other ways in which viewers claimed that they identified with Jess were more general.¹⁷ In addition to those we have mentioned regarding childhood, church and family, many respondents identified with Jess on particular occasions when adults oppressed, denied or misunderstood her: one claimed identification with her situation as an adopted child; another with her isolation at school; another with her grief over the death of her elderly friend. All were based on their own experiences of adoption, loneliness and grief.

We cannot guess whether any random sample would produce as many correlations between text and experience, nor presume to define the nature and intensity of most people's everyday lives. But we can suggest that if, as Raymond Williams claimed, culture is 'ordinary'¹⁸ then our definitions of 'ordinary' need to be extended. It is a concept that appears to be widely used to invalidate the experience and opinions of whole sections of the population as somehow 'exceptional'.

If in cultural studies we work with a definition of the ordinary which assumes an ideologically-constructed typicality in people's lives, ignoring the intensity and specificity of their experiences, situations and positionings, we are in danger of fetishizing the 'ordinary reader/viewer' in a way that will exclude most actual readers and viewers. We would suggest that this danger is very real. It can be argued, for instance, that despite the serious attention now given in media studies to previously despised forms such as soap opera and melodrama, feminist work on gendered genres has tended to reinforce stereotypes of women viewers as much as it has challenged them. Unfortunately, this construction of the female viewer as housewife and mother has tended to become a 'given' of audience studies, to the extent that empirical studies have sought her out as representing the 'ordinary woman'. Thus both David Morley and Ann Gray in their work on television viewing and video use respectively, chose to study only (white) nuclear families.¹⁹ These are, of course, quite legitimate research strategies, with very suggestive findings, but they do have the effect of reinforcing 'the family' as the norm, and defining the ordinary woman as a lower-to-middle-class white, married, heterosexual mother: anyone else is not ordinary.

Thus, rather than exploring difference and diversity among and within constituencies of female viewers, such research has tended to reproduce a very narrow definition of what constitutes the female viewer and her cultural experience, and one, moreover, that submits to the tyranny of ordinariness. In relation to the feminist academic, this figure comes to occupy the role of a nonfeminist 'other' whose

17 We use the term here as it was used by the viewers; it implies an empathetic relationship. Empathy sits rather usefully inbetween the social reader's 'recognition' of shared experience with the fictional character, and the textual reader's 'identification' with (wanting to be the same as) a fictional character.

18 Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), p. 37.

19 David Morley, *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* (London: Comedia, 1986); Ann Gray, 'Behind closed doors: video recorders in the home', in Helen Baehr and Gillian Dyer (eds), *Boxed In: Women and Television* (New York and London, Pandora, 1987); Ann Gray, *Video Playtime: the Gendering of a Leisure Technology* (London and New York: Comedia/Routledge, 1992).

aberrant tastes have to be explained by the researcher in 'rational' – that is, feminist academic – terms. With the increasing intellectualization of feminist politics, feminist academics, in defining the ordinary woman as 'not me', have come to define themselves not only as 'not feminine' but also as 'not ordinary women'.

In two recent articles, Charlotte Brunsdon²⁰ discusses the development of a division between 'feminists' and 'women', and the problems arising in research and teaching from the conflicting desires of women (for femininity) and feminists (to transform ordinary women into feminists). In place of a 'recruitist' stand, she recommends that feminist academics adopt 'a rather more provisional, attentive, even ironic sense of self – and other'.²¹ Maybe, but we would be wary of a strategy that risked collapsing feminist into feminine and simultaneously, perhaps, a respect for difference into an uncritical acceptance of all positions. Feminists cannot wholeheartedly embrace the feminine as currently defined without ceasing to be feminists. But we can question the conceptual tools we have inherited, and we wish to question the concept of the ordinary woman. Although we cannot dispense with concepts in analysis, we must remember that they *are* concepts, and not people.

In this research, we set out to test our own reading of *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* against those of other women. We feel that on the basis of the responses we received, the 'naturalizing' of lesbianism that we had identified as the text's strategy was largely successful. We also feel that in general, and despite differences of emphasis, all agreed that what the text 'was about' was 'female identity'. The pleasures we all derived from the text had a great deal in common, and were aesthetic as well as thematic. The high production values were enjoyed both for themselves and because they signalled that the (female) concerns of the text were being taken seriously. It seems that the 'quality' aspect of the production need not be seen only in terms of 'silencing the prudess'.²²

There were, of course, differences but they were not greater between researchers and respondents than between the respondents themselves. Nor did they correlate neatly with socially defined identities: there were tendencies towards certain interpretations and/or pleasures according to age, sexuality and motherhood, but not such as to amount to a 'lesbian' reading versus a 'heterosexual' one, or an 'older' reading versus a 'younger' one. There was certainly not a 'black' reading versus a 'white' one; not even in the reading of Katy, Jess's second lover, who is black.²³ We would say that overall the diversity remained within a recognizable 'we' of common experiences and common pleasures which seemed to owe much to our common positions as women.²⁴

²⁰ Charlotte Brunsdon, 'Pedagogies of the feminine: feminist teaching and women's genres', *Screen*, vol. 32, no. 4 (1991), pp. 364–81; and 'Identity in feminist television criticism', *Media Culture and Society*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1993), pp. 309–20.

²¹ Brunsdon, 'Pedagogies of the feminine', p. 381.

²² Hinds, 'Oranges are Not the Only Fruit', p. 160.

²³ Katy's 'racial' identity attracted only one comment, from a white close reader who thought that, because the text made so little of her, her being 'Asian' felt like tokenism.

²⁴ A similar point about their research into soap opera viewing is made by Seiter et al., in "'Don't treat us like we're so stupid and naive": towards an ethnography of soap opera viewers' in Seiter et al. (eds), *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 243. 'In analysing the interview tapes, and transcripts, our status as women and our activation of specific patterns of gendered communication emerge as the most decisive factors for the developing interlocutions.'

²⁵ For example: Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (London: Methuen, 1982); Gray, 'Behind closed doors: video recorders in the home'; Gray, *Video Playtime: the Gendering of a Leisure Technology*.

²⁶ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), p. 289.

What we would wish to conclude from this is that, first, the choice of text – 'postfeminist' (as some might like to describe it), and straddling the high–popular divide – facilitated a methodology that did not separate viewers and researchers in the same way as soaps and sitcoms seem to. Secondly, identifications were not determined by subject positions, making identity construction far more complex than the gender and class reductionist models often used.²⁵ Thirdly, the very small sample of close readers allowed the discussions to reveal the *extraordinary* in the lives of apparently ordinary women. This suggests that the concept of 'ordinary' does not do justice to the complexity, intensity or change in people's lives, nor to the mix of similarities and differences between them. It is an ideological concept, and finally as untrue as the concept of 'the masses' it seems so often to replace. And as Raymond Williams said, 'There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses'.²⁶

From the dark ages to the golden age: women's memories and television reruns

LYNN SPIGEL

A few years ago, when my niece was five years old, I was telling her a story about the time my sister and I were children, dressing up in my mother's Jackie Kennedy ensemble, complete with pink jacket and pill box hat. This story was curiously meaningful to me and fun to tell, but as far as my niece was concerned, I might as well have been talking about the Jurassic period. This five-year-old had obviously already formed a picture of the past that was totally alien to her own present. Clearly, that picture came primarily from reruns of *I Love Lucy* (1951–7) which my sister and I still love and still watch. My niece, who had already seen her fair share of *Lucy*, interrupted my nostalgic tale: 'Do you mean', she asked, 'the days when everything was in black and white?' At first I thought she was precociously demonstrating her ability to critique early television's simplistic portrayal of good and evil, but then I realized that this child really believed that the world itself was black and white in the 1950s and 1960s because that was how television pictured it for her.

This five-year-old's mistake might seem a cute anecdote for the family diary, but television's representation of the past, and its relation to the historical consciousness of viewers is more generally regarded as a matter of public importance. I open with this anecdote because I want to explore the intersection between the private histories of viewers and the way public histories (especially histories of women) are constructed through television reruns. And most importantly, I open with this family anecdote because the problems

I want to address hinge on the generational politics between women, especially with respect to the role that television plays in creating images of women's pasts and the idea of women's progress now.

Television reruns, official history, and popular memory

The question I want to deal with in this essay originated as a pedagogical problem. In my senior level course on television history I regularly assign a term paper that asks students to define and research a topic of their choice. The open-ended nature of this assignment leaves plenty of room for the imagination but also makes for some rather 'generic' topics. Every year, one of these topics is the changing role of women on television. And every year, my students set out to prove that female characters have changed for the better and that these changes reflect progress in the wider society. Knowing that such papers usually serve to reproduce (rather than to challenge) reigning mythologies about women, history and progressive social change, I warn students against this topic or ask them to reconsider their aims. But despite my warnings, women (and to a lesser degree, men) in my classes produce a rather predictable teleological historical narrative that derides the 1950s and traces the 'progress' of contemporary society and culture.

Why do so many undergraduates want to write this paper? The more jaded among us are probably thinking the popularity of this topic can be traced to those shady research companies that sell ready-made essays to desperate students. But I prefer a less cynical explanation and would instead like to consider some of the reasons why this particular topic speaks to the concerns of so many female undergraduates. To this end, I shall present a set of oral interviews and writing projects I conducted with women college students. This 'data', it should be understood, cannot speak for itself, but it can begin to reveal some possibilities when considered with larger questions about the logic of popular memory, and especially with the role that television plays in providing young women with a sense of women's history. Indeed, the students' desire to write this paper – even with the clear and present danger of a bad grade – suggests to me the stubbornness of a particular way of thinking about the past that television itself promotes and perpetuates.

Let me leave the question of the undergraduate population aside for a moment in order to show how this historical sensibility works on our television screens. The example comes from an episode of *Kate and Allie* (1984–9), a 'single-mom' sitcom based on the premise of two divorced women sharing a home with their children. This 1987 episode features two dream sequences that parody female characters of vintage sitcoms: Lucy Ricardo and Ethel Mertz (from *I Love Lucy*) and Mary Richards and Rhoda Morgenstern (from *The*

Mary Tyler Moore Show [1970–77]). The sequences respectively poke fun at the stereotypical 1950s housewife and the equally stereotypical ‘new woman’ working girl of the 1970s. In the *Lucy* segment, which is rendered in vintage black and white, Kate (as the frumpy Ethel) and Allie (as the glam housewife Lucy) plot one of Lucy’s famous schemes to break into show business behind Ricky’s back. In the *Mary* segment, the women (who sport seventies hairdos and polyester clothing) occupy a replica set of Mary Richard’s flat while chatting about the sexual lives of Mary’s co-workers (a clearly liberated topic). In both flashbacks the past becomes a cartoonish masquerade – a parody of feminine (and televisual) styles – that renders both versions of femininity outdated and even absurd.

Like other forms of contemporary television, this episode is full of intertextual references to television history, but I use this specific case to demonstrate the way television remembers itself – the type of popular history it depicts. Like my undergraduate students, this programme compares the past with the present, suggesting that women have indeed ‘come a long way’ on television and, by extension, in the culture at large. For in contrast to Lucy and Ethel and Mary and Rhoda, Kate and Allie appear to be ‘newer women’ who mark the enlightenment of our time by alluding to the ‘dark ages’ of old television.

Beyond the individual text, television more generally promotes this kind of historical consciousness because it constantly juxtaposes present-day programmes with reruns from the past. Historians tend to isolate periods of television – the ‘Golden Age’, the ‘Vast Wasteland’, ‘The Turn Towards Relevance’, and so forth. Such periodizations are based on programmes that are representative of prime-time network production during specific moments of television history. But they ignore television’s overall institutional practices, particularly in this case its local scheduling flows and syndication packages.¹ For this reason, these periodizations begin to collapse as conceptual categories once we recognize that audiences are potentially interpreting new shows within the context of the syndicated reruns that surround them on the daily schedule.

The advent of the nostalgia network is perhaps the best case in point. I am referring here to the children’s cable network, Nickelodeon, which at 8.00 p.m. transforms itself into Nick at Nite, a cult lineup of ‘classic’ television reruns.² Above all, Nick at Nite was a wise business move for Nickelodeon, which is owned by Viacom, one of the largest US syndication companies. Viacom (which has recently merged with Paramount and is also the parent company of MTV) owns a ready-made stable of old network programmes that it more typically sells to local and independent stations, as well as foreign markets.

The popularity of Nick at Nite’s reruns probably has less to do with the universal appeal of television art – its ability to last through

1 There is surprisingly little academic interest in reruns, even while they comprise so much of the television experience. The majority of work that deals with reruns revolves around cult programmes and fan cultures. See, for example, Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1992). For a previous study which speaks more directly to my interests here see Lynn Spigel and Henry Jenkins, ‘Same Bat channel/ different Bat times: mass culture and popular memory’, in William Uricchio and Roberta Pearson (eds), *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 117–48. Most recently, Phil Williams has explored the industrial history of the rerun in his ‘Feeding off the past: the evolution of the television rerun’, *Journal of Popular Film and Television* vol. 21, no. 4 (1994), pp. 162–75.

2 As Karen Lury tells me, British readers will recognize that Nick at Nite is similar to the cable/satellite stations UK Gold and Bravo.

generations – than with the network's strategies of recontextualization. Nickelodeon created a new reception context for old reruns by repackaging them through a camp sensibility. In one series of promos, for example, vintage sitcom star Dick Van Dyke informs us of the network's mission to preserve our 'television heritage' by airing such indispensable sitcoms as *The Donna Reed Show* (1958–66). Nick also runs cult marathons targeted at the youth market. To inaugurate its revival of *The Partridge Family* (a sitcom that originally aired in 1970–74 and starred teenage heartthrob David Cassidy), the network ran a week-long marathon of episodes (four a night) followed by a Saturday night special hosted by Cassidy (which the network dubbed 'Very Very David Cassidy'). In a brilliant stroke of youth market saturation, Nickelodeon's sister station MTV aired its own *Partridge Family* marathon that same weekend.

As is obvious from my above examples, Nick specializes in sitcoms, especially ones about women and/or family relationships. And because it eclectically places sitcoms from different decades back to back with one another, it implicitly narrates a history of women's roles on television. More explicitly, it promotes a certain way of thinking about this history through satiric promotions that, for example, poke fun at Donna Reed as television's ideal sacrificing mother, or else compare Mary Tyler Moore's 'new woman' role as Mary Richards to her earlier role as housewife Laurie Petrie on *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (1961–6). In an even grander gesture of this historical sensibility, Nickelodeon produced (in connection with ABC) its own situation comedy, *Hi Honey, I'm Home* (1991), which details the fantastic exploits of the Nielsens, a 1950s sitcom family who were taken out of rerun on the local TV schedule and relocated to a 'real-life' 1990s suburb in New Jersey (a postmodern conceit if there ever was one). The Nielsens, who appear in vintage black and white and are appropriately attired in campy sitcom garb, cannot quite get the hang of modern living, particularly since their neighbour Elaine is a divorced single mother who continually slips into monologues about women's liberation and derides Honey Nielsen for her 'housewifey' ways.³

Such tongue-in-cheek programmes and promotions speak to a young, television-literate generation by constructing a vision of the past that implicitly suggests the 'progress' of contemporary culture. And, as Nick at Nite's programmes and promotions imply, the female characters on these television reruns are to be viewed by today's generation through the screen of its distance from the past – through its more 'hip' attitudes and culture. Granted, the network mixes its message of distanced hipness with a fair-sized dose of romantic nostalgia for the good old days of television when everyone lived in shiny happy suburbs. But despite this nostalgia, the idea that the viewer is somehow more enlightened than the characters

3 This was the first cable-network cooperative venture for a sitcom series. In the summer of 1991, Nickelodeon aired the sitcom first on ABC and then repeated it two nights later on Nick at Nite. It was cancelled after its summer run on ABC, but continued for another season on Nick at Nite.

(and audiences) of the past is absolutely central to the interpretation the network solicits. Thus, both in its individual texts and in its institutional strategies of syndication, television recontextualizes the past in terms of contemporary uses and perspectives. Indeed, like my students, television engages in a kind of historical consciousness that remembers the past in order to believe in the progress of the present.

Of course, on one level, this sense of history is not simply 'wrong'; there have been real changes for women in the last four decades. However, such enlightenment notions are based as much on forgetting the past as on remembering it. As historians have widely noted, progress in history is often uneven; in the case of women, it refers largely to white middle-class women who benefited most from the women's movement, while women of colour have seen less gain. Moreover, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the gains that white women have seen have often been at the *expense* of women of colour – not only because feminist movements have historically worked to re-enact racist power hierarchies and social agendas, but also because feminism has historically conceptualized the category of 'woman' as being synonymous with 'whiteness'. As bell hooks reminds us, while this 'in no way invalidates feminism as a political ideology' that works against sexism, it is nevertheless a fact that 'every women's movement in the USA from its earliest origin to the present day has been built on a racist foundation'.⁴

In addition, historical narratives that chart women's progress often celebrate women's enlightenment in the present at the expense of undercutting their agency in the past. But, as feminist historians such as Elaine Tyler May have argued, women in the 1950s were not simply passive dupes of patriarchy; instead they made rational choices based on available options at the time, and they often expressed discontent with their roles.⁵

Similarly, despite the popular wisdom, 1950s television was not based on a simple consensus ideology, or at least not one as simple as we might first assume. Historians and fans of television will recall the endless plots on situation comedies that revolved around middle-class housewives who chose between privilege and autonomy on a weekly basis. For example, Lucy Ricardo perpetually tried to get out of the house and into the work force, and even the more idealized dramas such as *Father Knows Best* (1954–63) questioned their own assumptions about gender roles in plots that worked through tensions about women's place.⁶ Moreover, a number of series featured working-class and ethnic women such as the Jewish Molly Goldberg (*The Goldbergs*, 1952–6), the Norwegian Marta Hansen (*Mama*, 1949–56), and the black maid Beulah (*Beulah*, 1950–53). Although many of these programmes had highly stereotypical characters (and some were challenged at the time of

4 bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), p. 124.

5 Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

6 For a discussion of these issues see Patricia Mellencamp, 'Situation comedy, feminism, and Freud: discourses of Gracie and Lucy' in Tania Modleski (ed.), *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 80–95. In a somewhat different context, Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch discuss the ways that *Father Knows Best* expresses anxieties about women's roles. See their 'Television as a cultural forum', in Horace Newcomb (ed.), *Television: The Critical View* (fifth edition) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 503–15.

their initial broadcasts), for better or worse, they form part of our 'television heritage', a part that Nick at Nite and other syndication outlets often exclude from our view of the cultural past. This process of exclusion, then, creates an image of the past that is highly one dimensional, an image that has no doubt helped to shape the historical consciousness of my students.

But this is not to say my students are simply 'bad girls' who disregard their history professors in favour of the lessons taught on their television screens. Instead, I believe they are caught between two ways of thinking about the past – one properly 'academic' and the other conventionally 'popular'. As opposed to the professional ideals (if not always practices) of exhaustive data gathering, accuracy, and conclusive analysis, the histories told in the texts of popular culture simplify the complexity of historical events. This process of simplification isn't a matter of intellectual deficiencies. It is not that people are incapable of dealing with the more complex situations that professional historians study. Rather, this way of thinking about the past has a logic and purpose of its own.

This historical sensibility can be considered by way of the concept of popular memory. As I use the term, popular memory is history for the present; it is a mode of historical consciousness that speaks to the concerns and needs of contemporary life. Popular memory is a form of storytelling through which people make sense of their own lives and culture. In this regard, it diverges from official, professional history (by which I mean those histories deemed legitimate by schools, museums, textbook publishers and other arbiters of social knowledge). Whereas official history typically masks its own storytelling mechanisms, popular memory acknowledges its subjective and selective status. Popular memory is playful about the past, and while it certainly elides the complexity of historical events, it never claims to do otherwise. As in the parodic vision of the *Kate and Allie* episode or the campy images of Nick at Nite, this form of storytelling is less concerned with historical 'accuracy' than it is with the uses that memory has for the present. Rather than implicitly proposing a divide between fiction and science (the central concern that underlies the texts of professional history), popular memory self-consciously mixes these modes together, and often in a self-reflexive way. For this reason, it would be foolhardy to judge it by the standards of official history. Popular memory does not set out to find 'objective', 'accurate' pictures of the past. Instead, it aims to discover a past that makes the present more tolerable. Indeed, as I want to show in this essay, the undergraduates in my classes had a particular vision of the 1950s that glossed over historical contradictions in order to present a simplified portrait of the 1950s housewife – a portrait that made contemporary struggles in women's lives seem less difficult.

The opposition I am suggesting between popular and official pasts,

7 Michael Bommes and Patrick Wright, "'Charms of residence': the public and the past" in Richard Johnson et al. (eds), *Making Histories: Studies in History Writing and Politics* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 225. In this passage, Bommes and Wright are considering the reasons Michel Foucault abandoned the notion of popular memory in his later work. Although Bommes and Wright expose the problems with the notion of the 'popular', they attempt to resuscitate its usefulness as an area for critical debate.

8 On this issue especially see Michel de Certeau, 'History: science and fiction', *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 199–221.

9 See, for example, Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). More generally, within the academy there is an expanding field of critical historiography (represented by White, Michel de Certeau and Dominick La Capra among others), which addresses issues of narrativity, scientism, subjectivity and objectivity, and relationships between official and popular history. In addition, there is now a growing interest in the relationship between memory and history.

10 Dominick La Capra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 34–5.

11 See the interview with Michel Foucault in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 251/52 (1974), pp. 5–15. The French text was translated by Martin Jordin for *Radical Philosophy* 11 and reprinted in 'Film and popular memory: *Cahiers du Cinéma* extracts', *Edinburgh '77 Magazine* no. 2, pp. 22–5.

Critical theory of the history film became important in France in the first half of the 1970s, and later in the decade these discussions reverberated in Britain and the US. In the

however, is not absolute. As Michael Bommes and Patrick Wright have argued, popular memory is intimately connected to the more dominant perceptions of history that circulate in a society, and to think otherwise 'is to risk treating "the popular" as if it were wholly unified, fully achieved and therefore capable of sustaining a memory wholly apart from the dominant constructions of the past'.⁷ Indeed, the enlightenment models used by my undergraduate students can also be found in the more official, textbook versions of women's history. Then too, popular memories are often constructed and disseminated by dominant social institutions such as television, to the point where such memories become what Britain's popular memory group has called 'dominant memories'. For this reason, the term 'popular memory' should not be understood in terms of transcendental consciousness or even the more poststructuralist notion of 'resistance'; instead, popular memory is enmeshed in knowledge circulated by dominant social institutions.

Just as popular memory is dependent upon more official pasts, official history is bound up in the larger stories that the society tells about its past. Historians have long debated the divide between science and fiction that professional history strives towards.⁸ As contemporary critical historiographers such as Hayden White have argued, the narrative aims of official history make it subject to storytelling mechanisms that simplify the past to make it accessible to people in the present.⁹ And, as Dominick La Capra adds, facts and fictions are intimately intertwined in any historical account because the documentary record is not a neutral record of data, but is itself already 'textually processed' by the culture in which it is produced.¹⁰ According to this point of view, then, the official record and the means for explicating that record can never exist outside of the stories and discursive logics of the larger social world.

Because popular memory and official history are intimately connected, generic hybrids abound. It is in this inbetween place that I would put history films and telehistories. As numerous scholars have demonstrated, history films and telehistories often displace, rewrite and 'reprogramme' the past, and they encourage audiences to mistake 'belief' for 'truth'.¹¹ The various television docudramas of John and Jacqueline Kennedy are good examples of the hybrid status of such texts. On the one hand, these docudramas often announce themselves as authoritative accounts through the use of period costumes, voiceovers, news footage, and famous speeches. At the same time, they invite audiences to play with these truths by self-consciously acknowledging their deviations from hard fact. Both publicity and the texts themselves delight in conjecture, relating scandalous stories of Kennedy's affairs and Jackie's compulsive shopping sprees. Even while these docudramas stage the 'official' single-bullet theory closure with motorcade footage of Kennedy's death, the story (by its very nature) cannot help but conjure up the

Cahiers interview, Foucault used the term 'popular memory' to describe the popular stories told by groups (orally and in song) who did not have access to official historical writing. He claimed that in the twentieth century the popular memories of class struggle had increasingly been 'reprogrammed' by such apparatuses as cheap novels, school curricula, and the history film. (This position on memory and history seems a rather odd one for Foucault to take because it sounds more like anthropology than his preferred method of archaeology).

12 Foucault briefly describes 'counter-memory' in relation to a philosophical question about alterity in history. See: Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977). George Lipsitz later reused and redefined the term in his innovative book *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990). I would argue that Lipsitz uses the phrase 'counter-memory' in a way more analogous to Foucault's earlier notion of 'popular memory' (see the *Cahiers* interview cited above). As Foucault did in that interview, Lipsitz discusses how folk traditions, songs, and oral storytelling give voice to the historical memories of people who don't typically have access to historical writing. But unlike Foucault, who spoke of the increasing loss of working-class memory in the face of mass media, Lipsitz argues that these memories have a material and cultural base in various ethnic and working-class communities, and he also shows how these memories speak (although in tempered and distorted ways) through popular novels, popular music, television and film.

other possible 'endings' that circulate in the rumour mills of popular history. In this regard, I would argue that film and television histories contain within them a popular version of what Michel Foucault called 'counter-memory'.¹² That is, while they draw on strategies of professional history to authenticate themselves as the 'official story', they also narrate another past that often implicitly contradicts the official version. In a quite paradoxical way, they invite alternate readings even as they position themselves as authoritative accounts.

Thus, whether produced in the halls of academia or pictured on our television screens, memory and history are not mutually exclusive domains. Still, as I want to argue, they have different uses and different goals. The question for analysis is not whether popular memory has 'ideological effects' – since all history does – but what kinds of effects it aims to have. Why is it popular to remember the past in this way in the first place?

History lessons

In order to explore the above question, I returned to my undergraduate students in the hope of discovering some clues as to why they construct historical narratives about television and women that affirm the present by glossing over the complexity of the past. I did this research at the University of Wisconsin at Madison where most students are from the Midwest. Almost all of the students were aged nineteen to twenty-one and white (the few older students and students of colour had to interact in that context). About half of the students came from the suburbs, about a quarter were rural Midwesterners, and about a quarter were from urban areas (especially Milwaukee, Chicago and New York). Very few of the students had taken a women's studies course at the University. I conducted three oral discussion sessions, with about twenty women in each, that ran for approximately an hour. In addition to these discussion sections, I conducted three hour-long sessions in which a total of seventy-four undergraduate women wrote five page essays. The essay assignment read as follows:

A) What do you think women were like in the 1950s? What did they do on an average day? What did they hope for and dream about? What did they fear and worry about? What were their relationships with men and women like?

B) How do you know these things about women in the 1950s?

Both the students in the discussion group and those who wrote essays also filled out a short survey asking them to list favourite reruns from different decades and also asking them if they thought

13 I had the students fill out these surveys *after* they had written their essays in order to minimize the problem of 'leading' these students into writing about television. Because I did not have the same concerns in the discussion groups, these students filled out the surveys at the beginning of the sessions, and we used them as a point of discussion throughout.

14 For an important discussion of how power relations such as this affect the atmosphere of women's media classes see Charlotte Brunsdon 'Pedagogies of the feminine: feminist teaching and women's genres', *Screen*, vol. 32, no. 4 (1992), pp. 364–81.

any women on television serve as good role models.¹³

The point of this study was not to produce generalizable data, but rather to open up a dialogue about the relationship of history to memory, as well as television's place within that complex relationship. My use of the word 'dialogue' here does not refer to a utopian democratic situation, because I could see from the start that my students still recognized my position of power in this conversation and that they wanted to please me.¹⁴ Many of the students knew me as their television professor so, understandably, many also knew that I was probably fishing around for information on how television helped form their vision of the past. I think these students might have even overestimated television's influence on their image of the past in order to please me. (However, I do believe from their essays and discussions that the students certainly did use television reruns as a prime source of historical information; it's just the extent of television's role in their memories that I question.)

But again, my point was not to erase myself or to fool the students into being open books from whom I could collect objective data. For this reason, I did not set up a 'control group' of students who were unaware of my research interests. Instead, I wanted to see how our conversations developed and how I could use this dialogue as a point of intervention between my own status as a professional media historian and the popular texts that I teach. Although I had assumed that the students' narratives (both written and oral) would present highly generic, stereotypical images of 1950s housewives, I was somewhat overwhelmed by the incredible conformity of the images they had. Poodle skirts, ponytails, and pointy eyeglasses were mentioned time and time again. Typical descriptions from the written essays read as follows:

Women in the 1950s could be described as much more passive than the women of today. . . . The goal of women was to find the 'perfect man' and settle down. . . . I think back to the television show *Leave it to Beaver* and imagine life for women as being similar to June Cleaver's.

In the 1950s, women were very different than they are today. Most women were not expected to go to college and make something of their lives. . . . It is easy to see from shows like *Donna Reed*, *Father Knows Best*, and *Leave it to Beaver* that the mother was a supermom who got up early in the morning to fix breakfast and make her kids lunches, clean the house, and help solve problems.

I would say that women in the 1950s wore more plain styles than today. The mental image I get of the fifties is the happy Cunningham family on *Happy Days*. I can just see Joni in her

long black poodle skirt and her pink cardigan. . . . I guess then *Laverne and Shirley* would be another vote for the Joni look.

Women in the fifties were very different than the women of today. . . . When one pictures a typical woman in the fifties, one's thoughts tend to be geared toward a woman like Marion Cunningham from *Happy Days* or Mrs. Cleaver from *Leave It to Beaver*. Women in the fifties wore big puff skirts, tight sweaters, polyester pants.

These comments are typical of other student essays and discussions on a number of levels. First, although I did not ask the women to compare the 1950s to the 1990s, their primary mode for thinking about the past was through comparison with the present – a situation that suggests the past was relevant to the students insofar as it was pertinent to their own lives. In making the past relevant, they also engaged in a process of familiarization; they made sense of the past by describing it in terms of a repertoire of images with which they were acquainted. As the above examples suggest, the women used television as their key source of familiarization. It was through television that these women claimed to know most about the 1950s.¹⁵

As the above examples show, many women used actual 1950s reruns and nostalgia sitcoms like *Happy Days* interchangeably, and in fact many had trouble differentiating between them.¹⁶ By imposing a contemporary logic on historical events, nostalgia sitcoms help to do the work of familiarization for their audiences, allowing viewers to remember only those details of the past that seem useful for the present. Through their ambiguous status as a 'contemporary past', these television programmes provide a sense of intimacy with, and even mastery over, history because they distil the complexity of historical events into recognizable styles and stories. In a discussion section, one woman even said that she felt the nostalgia shows were better historical sources than the actual 1950s reruns because 'they take the epitome of everything from the fifties and put it into one show, whereas programs like *Leave It to Beaver* . . . just seem old. There isn't anything characteristic of . . . the fifties [whereas in] *Happy Days* . . . they don't miss a thing.'¹⁷

At this point in my research, I felt that I had spent a good deal of time to discover a fairly obvious point: television serves as one of our culture's primary sources for historical consciousness. The next logical conclusion, drawn by so many critics of the medium, would be that television caused these women to have a skewed sense of their own past; it was television's 'fault', so to speak, that these women had highly stereotyped notions about their heritage. However, I discovered something different. While it is true that the students used television programmes as a key source for thinking about the past, they were in fact very self-critical of the fact that so

15 While I don't have the space to consider this at length, it is interesting to note that students almost never used films as references for the past.

16 As will be evidenced in a later quotation, some students also confused programmes from different time periods, thinking, for example, as one student did that *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* was an example of 1950's television.

17 Perhaps this statement also lends credence to Frederic Jameson's vision of historical sensibility (or the waning thereof) in the postmodern age of nostalgia. See his *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

many of their memories came from television. Indeed, even while they wrote and spoke at length about the 1950s, they often reflected on the inadequacy of their sources. Responding to my essay question that asked how they knew about the 1950s (but did not ask them to evaluate their sources of knowledge), many students addressed these problems head on. One woman wrote:

I am not exactly sure of the things that I have just cited, I could be entirely wrong. What I know about the fifties woman is what I have taken directly from the television screen. I based a lot, or most, of my knowledge on June Cleaver.

Another stated:

Most of my ideas, I admit, came from television. Shows like *Leave it to Beaver*, *My Three Sons*, and *Lucy* are just a few examples. Perhaps it is [because of] TV that all of my opinions or a lot of them are stereotypical. . . . It is amazing how TV has shaped my idea of women throughout time.

And one woman even wrote:

While I am aware that the Cleavers were not the typical family, it is their image that projects itself into my head upon mention of the 1950s. . . . Okay, okay, I admit it, born and raised in the seventies I am a true product of the TV age. My perceptions of days past are based on reruns!

More generally, the students noted that the images they had from television were more stereotypical than typical, and some students also acknowledged that these television images were more exclusive to the white middle class than representative of all women. Along these lines one woman wrote, 'I realize *Leave It to Beaver* is such a white bread show and doesn't depict your normal family'. Another claimed, 'I'm speaking about the stereotypical middle class. Obviously not everyone was like this.' And another student warned, 'Please note that I am describing women of the 1950s of the middle class. When thinking of the working woman I imagine her with a "service" job. A waitress working at the local diner.'

Some argued that family pictures and stories help shape their sense of the past and serve as a kind of 'reality' test for the images on television. In a discussion section one woman claimed, 'It's hard for me think those shows are real as far as a real portrayal of the fifties because my grandmother always told me that she had no time for social life. She was busy cleaning and sending my dad to work.' Another said, 'I saw photo albums and no one was happy. They are real pictures so I tend to side with them.' Thus, as John Nerone has argued, the personal past can serve as a critical tool for analysing a social memory circulated by dominant institutions like television. In addition, Nerone shows how a memory that belongs to a specific

18 John Nerone, 'Social memory and professional history', *Communication*, no. 11 (1989), pp. 89–104.

social group – such as an ethnic group – can be used by people to challenge a dominant social memory.¹⁸ In this case, students from rural areas typically used their group identity as rural Americans to contest the urban and suburban images of women on 1950s TV. For instance, when talking about 1950s programmes, one woman explained, 'I thought that's how people in the cities may have lived. I lived very far from any towns . . . so when I grew up I thought that's what women in the cities did.' Another woman commented, 'I think it depends on rural or urban communities too. I don't think rural women were as able to go to the beauty parlor that often.' Thus, while these women believed that television programmes might have reflected part of our national past, they used their own regional and personal memories to contest the dominant social memory that television constructs.

In general then, the women were quite self-conscious about their use of television as a primary source of knowledge for the 1950s. They almost all agreed that the past of which they spoke was largely fictional and open to question. But still they continued to believe that the present was better than the past, and their stories almost all suggested that women had come a long way since June Cleaver and Marion Cunningham. In essence, then, they used evidence about the past that they themselves deemed faulty in order to make truth claims about progress in the present. Again, I would suggest that historical accuracy was not finally what mattered in the stories that they told. Instead, these women were engaging in a mode of popular memory that simplified the past in order to affirm the present. In this regard, the storytelling mechanism in which they engaged might be considered to be one of disavowal: these students seemed to disavow their disbelief in television in order to legitimate the idea that women's lives have substantially improved since the 1950s. Almost all students agreed that we are now living in an age of enlightenment where women have more choices and more career opportunities. Within this construction of the present, the past served as a comparative index by which people could measure their relative liberation. In this regard, television reruns and nostalgia shows might well have served the purpose of legitimation because they provide us with pictures of women whose lives were markedly less free than our own.¹⁹ In fact, when I asked the students in one session if the stereotypical depiction of women in television reruns made them angry, one woman said, 'No, I think it's something to laugh at now . . . take it for what it was, it's not that way now'. Another claimed, 'It kinda makes you glad you are alive today and not back then'. Television thus served as a central form of legitimating the present.

I use the word legitimation here with some trepidation because it's a loaded term. It suggests that these women are in some way busy justifying their own oppression, implicitly condoning contemporary

19 In another context, George Lipsitz (following Habermas) discusses how nostalgia works to legitimate consumerism on 1950s US television. See his *Time Passages*, ch. 3.

sexism by affirming their culture's progress. In some instances, I do think that is the case. In fact, for some women, faith in progress seemed to close off the need for a feminist movement in the present. Numerous women constructed stories that put the women's movement squarely in the past tense, implicitly justifying the backlash against feminism that was part and parcel of Reagan's and Bush's America. In a discussion section one student said, 'Women overcame the feminist movement in the seventies and eighties. I think women realized they don't have to be like men to be equals, thus, femininity is coming back into style along with a career and a family.' The word 'overcame' seems particularly interesting here since this woman spoke as if women's gains were won *in spite of* rather than *because of* women's political movements. Moreover, as with many students in the sessions, this woman tended to speak as if all women shared the same common goal for a career coupled with a heterosexual marriage. This idea of 'having it all', as many students put it, was continually put forward as the solution to what the students perceived as a prior kind of antifeminine feminism that they associated with the 1970s women's movement. One student even used the term 'ball-buster dyke' to describe the stereotypical feminist of the past who had not come to terms with her feminine self. Although this statement was the most extreme, many students seemed complicit with backlash discourses that have pitted femininity against feminism and, I think for this reason, many were wary of using the word feminism to describe their views and values.

As the above discussion already suggests, thinking about the past also sometimes turned to a nostalgic longing for the 'good old days' when girls were girls and boys made money. One woman wrote:

The fifties is my favorite time, and if I could have lived at any moment in time, it would have been then. The young women did not have the worries that we have today of being a 'career woman' and 'a good mother' at the same time. Housewives in the fifties may have been upset at their roles in society, but they did not know anything else so I think they were content.

In statements such as these, nostalgia served to legitimate sexism by making it tolerable and even preferable to the confusing events of present-day life. In a less direct way, such statements also justified the racism and class inequities of the present by suggesting that somehow all women had it better back then and that a return to the good old days would be possible for everyone. However, even when students romantically remembered the past as a better place, they typically mixed this nostalgia with a firm belief in future progress. The students often rendered the future as an ideal past where women could enjoy the privileges of stylish clothes, romance, luxury housing and other personal benefits (all values that they associated with the 1950s) and still have the personal freedom, intelligence,

political power and discretionary income of the ideal postfeminist woman. Nostalgia in this regard is not the opposite of progress, but rather its handmaiden. Like the idea of progress, nostalgia works to simplify history into a time-line of events that lead somewhere better. For these women, the idea of having it all was rendered through this mixture of nostalgic longing and progressive faith in a brighter future.

Thus, the process of thinking historically led these women to some quite ambiguous and contradictory statements. While they legitimated contemporary sexism and racism through the idea of historical progress, their nostalgia for a better past also forced them to consider the constraints of their own present. In this regard, the gaps and inconsistencies in their logic often seemed to lead them beyond their own assertions into what appeared to be hesitations, stumblings, uncertainties. Many of the students recognized that their statements about history were inconsistent. In this way, even while they seemed to embrace the backlash around them, the process of thinking historically also allowed many students to reconsider and to critique the sexism of the present. By comparing their contemporary lives to an imaginary past of poodle skirts and pointy glasses, these women might in some way have been opening up possibilities for thinking about change. Indeed, when considering their lives in terms of the simplified images of 1950s television, numerous students criticized the inequities of their own time. For example, one woman wrote:

I think women were probably happier in the 1950s, although more equal today. I'm not putting down equality, but women still are not fully equal, and in the fifties women's lives were less complicated. Most women who work today have to work and still have the main responsibility for the children.

For these women, the dark ages are over, but the golden age is still to come.

Curiously, as well, while the students generally did not connect sexual inequality to racial inequality, when I asked them if they had female role models on contemporary television, they most often named Clair Huxtable (Phylicia Rashad) of *The Cosby Show*.²⁰ Having grown up on *Cosby*, many of these women (who were almost all white) saw her as the ultimate woman who had combined a successful law career with a loving family life. Clair had it all. And only two students ever mentioned the fact that Clair was an African-American woman. Most students seemed just as colour blind as *The Cosby Show* does to the problems many black women face. The reasons for this, I am sure, are complex and require much more analysis than my evidence can sustain.

Tentatively speaking, I would say that the students might have felt it inappropriate to bring up the question of race because I had not

²⁰ About one third of the student surveys named this character. In comparison, the second largest group of stars/characters mentioned was an assortment of female newscasters who were named by about one tenth of the students.

asked about it in the first place. Then too, in our oral discussions, they might have felt it 'racist' to notice race. At any rate, when I asked them about this issue, they fell silent. We might interpret the students' identification with Clair as a sign of hope: that is, the presence of more black female characters on television helps break down racism by creating lines of identification between races. Or, we may interpret their responses as a measure of success for the much criticized *Cosby* strategy: that is, *Cosby's* attempt to elide race and class issues in favour of presenting ideal role models allows these students to comfortably identify with the upper-crust lifestyle of Clair without even thinking about the issues of race and class that affect women's ability to succeed. These two alternatives do not exhaust the possibilities, but they do suggest the difficulties involved in interpreting the silences in discussions such as these.

Generating knowledge/known generations

It is difficult, at best, to reconcile the ideas of progress and nostalgia that run through so many of the students' narratives with my own understanding of feminist history and my own relative discomfort with enlightenment models. But again, that would be to judge popular memory by the standards of a more official, professional history. That would be, I think, to misunderstand the storytelling mechanisms at work in popular memory and the reasons why people remember in the first place. Popular memory is bound up with its use-value in the present. It provides people with a way of making sense of an alienating and imperfect world. It operates as an often self-acknowledged fiction, a strategy for *believing* in what people themselves often seem to *know* isn't so. Within this, television seems to have a tenuous position. Its dual status as entertainment and information places the knowledge it distributes somewhere between fiction and science, between memory and history. At least in the case of the students in this study, that ambiguity is not lost. For them, television serves less as a document than as a dialogue. It allows people to tell stories about an ephemeral American past – stories that recast and redress the concerns of contemporary life.

For my part, the question that the study raises doubles back on my original problem: the dialogue between myself and my students. In my opening section, I displaced my teaching problem on to my students, chiding them for writing bad papers and punishing them with a bad grade for not learning the lessons of feminist cultural history. But finally, the problem really belongs to me, and I suppose many of us who teach the history of popular culture. It seems likely that my students are participating in a larger tendency to use television reruns and nostalgia programmes as a source for popular memory. Indeed, the stories about the past that are heard most

loudly and consistently are those broadcast on our national media. Although it would be hasty to assume that viewers are simply duped by these television images (indeed my students clearly understood that television is not an accurate picture of the past), alternative histories and countermemories are still typically excluded from the mass media and for this reason they are often erased from consciousness. Moreover, as I mentioned early on, television even erases its own past; it selects only a few programmes for syndication and leaves out countless others.

In distinction to such exclusions, professional history demands the opposite response – inclusion – but this academic impulse to simply know and teach it all is not always that simple. For example, when *Amos 'n' Andy* (1951–3) was taken out of rerun syndication in 1966, this came after a long struggle by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to cancel the show for its racist portrayals. Sometimes, then, exclusion and simplification are not merely ‘ideological’ tools forged in favour of producing a consensus view of the past. Sometimes, as in the case of the *Amos 'n' Andy* reruns, exclusion of the past is in dialogue with the continuing hurts of the present. In this light, the desire in professional history to ‘include’ often becomes highly problematic. What do your students do, for example, when you show them *Amos 'n' Andy* in the classroom? Is this an occasion for continued racism among students (as I think it often is) or is it a moment of discovery for them (as I think it can also be)?

These ethical issues are important, but they should in no way turn into an apology for continued exclusions. As Herman Gray has argued, the observation and analysis of racial exclusion, marginalization, and even hegemonic incorporation on US television should not be the end-point of television criticism. If it is, Gray warns, the critic simply reproduces the exclusionary logic of television itself. Instead, drawing on the work of George Lipsitz and Stuart Hall, Gray insists that it’s necessary to find voices – both in texts and among black audiences – that speak to black experiences and interpretations.²¹

Gray’s point is crucial. However, in the context of my study here and television pedagogy more generally, I want to suggest that the act of ‘giving voice’ presents its own difficulties. Students of colour are a very small minority in media programmes, and that does continue to create real problems in terms of their ability to ‘voice’ their perspectives, at least in the classroom. A number of black students have told me that they strategically avoid classes that are centrally about race (especially when these classes are taught by white teachers) because they do not wish to be used as the example of race among a class of white peers (who, of course, have the luxury of believing that they do not signify ‘race’).

For women of colour the problem, I suspect, is exacerbated. This

²¹ Herman Gray, ‘The endless side of difference: critical television studies, television and the question of race,’ *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* (June 1993), pp. 190–97.

was demonstrated to me in my television class last year when the only black female student in the class purposely stayed home on the day that I showed *Julia* (1968–71), the first US sitcom to feature an upwardly mobile black woman character in the leading role. Significantly, this female student had an especially interesting way of coping with her discomfort in the classroom and still giving voice to her feelings. That morning as I waited for class to begin, I received a fax from this woman that contained her analysis and criticisms of *Julia*, which she wanted me to read to the class. The fax described her memories of watching *Julia* as a young girl with her other black female friends, and it recalled how they had laughed at the ‘whitewashing’ of black culture that went on in the show. This woman certainly had memories of television that (as she told me later) formed a very important part of her personal history and her sense of black womanhood. But her only means of recovering that history (at least in the context of this mostly white classroom) was through ventriloquism, through having the teacher stand in as her dummy to recount her memories for her.

Aside from these problems of visibility and invisibility, voice and silence, I would like to conclude with a related pedagogical problem that might be called the persistence of memory over history. Let me clarify this point with an example. On several occasions after I read this paper at conferences, people asked me in essence why I am not a better teacher. Why do I not teach away these students’ misconceptions about the past? Why do I not show them all the programmes on early television, tell them more about women’s pasts, and thus give them a better sense of history? This question presupposes that academic history can cure students, that through the exhaustive inclusion of all the facts it can deliver people from the likes of Nick at Nite. But in practice, the problem is much more stubborn than this. For, as I mentioned early on, popular memories of the past have a way of asserting themselves in spite of the history lessons learned in educational institutions. Popular memory is, I believe, popular because it speaks to the concerns of the present in a way that professional histories often do not.²² It gives people ways to use the past in the context of everyday life, perhaps because the version of the past it offers is simple and open to application as a ‘moral’ lesson.

But my point, once again, is not to blame my students for embracing a reductive picture of historical events. Nor do I want to blame the texts of popular culture that engage their historical imaginations. Instead, I would suggest that we cannot simply ‘correct’ popular memory by teaching it away. Indeed, we need to stop thinking that television or movies or comic books are simply wrong or ‘ideological’ and that professional/official history is in some way a scientific antidote to such trivial misconceptions. Rather than deriding the popular and returning to a more ‘legitimate’ historical/

²² Although I do not think it is possible to prove the relative importance of media vs. education with the data I have, it is interesting that very few women students ever mentioned education as having any effect on their notion of women’s history. One woman even stated ‘I’m trying to remember from high school history classes, CA [our department at the University] classes, [but] television programs make up a lot of my images truthfully’. It is possible, of course, that women’s history was marginalized in the classes this woman has taken, and in this respect this student’s comment might reflect that marginalization as much as it reflects the relative importance of mass media over education in her more general sense of history.

cultural canon (as the cultural literacy advocates would suggest), we need to examine the relationships between popular memory and professional history. We need to understand why popular versions of the past are so persistent and so appealing, even among people who 'know' differently. Moreover, we need to consider how our own teaching can explore the relationships between popular memory and professional history. In this regard, we should confront our own imbrication in the popular memories that circulate in the world in which we live. To what extent is our 'professional' historical text informed by these popular narratives? How does our desire for progress and our nostalgia for the past help to shape the historical narratives that we write?

In this study, for example, I clearly had a big stake in wanting my students to desire the feminism of my own youth. Indeed, this research was based on what might well be my own nostalgia for a feminist movement that many of today's college women reject. For me, the sticky problem in this study is my blanket assumption that my students *should* desire feminism (which I no doubt associate with the 'golden age' of my own university experience) in the face of a student population which considers feminism to be part of the 'dark ages' of 1970s television. And in many ways, as so many women have suggested, the feminist movement of the 1970s was laced with its own race and class power structures, structures that certainly do not need to be revisited on our students.

In this sense, the professional historian is always embroiled in her own desires and her own sense of what should constitute the future. The historian is not immune to the nostalgia and enlightenment thinking that motivate our more popular versions of history. In many ways my nostalgia for the good old days of 1970s feminism is precisely the kind of simplification and disavowal that underlie the popular memories I have discussed here. Upon closer introspection, I can certainly remember a time in college when I (like my students) resisted academic feminism completely, so that my current embrace of the good old feminist past is nothing if not a historical revision.

For such reasons, we need to consider popular memory and professional history as part of a more intertwined social dynamic. By bringing popular memory into a dialectical tension with professional history, we might find a way to explicate the biases and blind spots of both. We might find a way to begin to address the things that divide women, divisions that leave women vulnerable to the authoritative, patriarchal will of historical discourses that pervade not only our television screens or our academic classrooms, but also the private stories that we tell ourselves each day.

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Cinema/memory/history

SUSANNAH RADSTONE

*Today people live in rooms that have never been touched by death,
dry dwellers of eternity . . .*¹

1 Walter Benjamin, 'The storyteller: reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 94.

The remembered boyhoods of *The Long Day Closes* (Terence Davies, UK, 1992) and *Cinema Paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore, Italy/France, 1988) place the cinema at the heart of troubled young lives. Toto, the young boy who is the central protagonist of *Cinema Paradiso*, is virtually brought up by cinema, as well as by Alfredo, the elderly cinema projectionist who stands in for Toto's missing father. Bud, whose childhood is remembered in *The Long Day Closes*, is also a solitary child for whom the cinema plays an equally formative role. Like Toto, Bud lacks a father and like Toto, Bud spends his time outside the cinema in what appears to be an over-close relationship with his unhappy mother. Both boys move between unhappy home lives, and the quasi-community of the cinema audience. The memories of boyhood that both films construct apparently substitute the cinema and its heroes for missing fathers. Their loving evocations of lost communities of cinemagoers gazing at bygone stars appear in this context then, as nostalgia for a missing father.

Cinema Paradiso and *The Long Day Closes* sit at the intersection of cinematic trends and theoretical concerns. The two films join contemporary mainstream cinema's recent predilection for narratives in which male protagonists remember, or 'revisit' the scenes of their youth, with the recently popular 'history/nostalgia' film. Both films also evidence a fascination with the cinema which marks them at their narrative and at their formal levels. At the level of narrative, this fascination plays itself out through the boys' own remembered

love of cinema, which provides the narrative pretext for both films to take cinematic quotation to its intertextual limit by their splicing of audio and visual cinematic quotations into their diegeses.

The cinematic crossroads at which *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes* sit can likewise be approached from parallel theoretical paths. One approach takes the centrality of boyhood in these films as the starting point for a feminist reading of their retrospective constructions of masculinity. This approach places the two films within a larger group of 1980's and 1990's movies in which men 'revisit the scenes of their youth'.² In the context of her discussion of gender and nostalgia, Caryl Flinn's reference to *Letter From An Unknown Woman* (Max Ophuls, US, 1948) is a pointed one, underlining that in this group of films it is the male protagonist, rather than Lisa, the heroine of *Letter From An Unknown Woman*, who compulsively returns to his past. Flinn's extremely brief reading of this film and an associated group of films exposes a set of questions concerning the stakes for masculinity's contemporary cinematic rememberings of itself. Flinn's reading suggests that a nostalgic return to fantasies of better times may underlie this cinematic trend³ – a formulation that though useful, leaves unanswered questions concerning the contemporary determinants of such fantasies as well as their origin. Interestingly, another feminist reading of *Letter From An Unknown Woman* suggests possible answers to such questions. In 'Time and desire in the woman's film', Tania Modleski's reading allows for correspondences between *Letter From An Unknown Woman* and the contemporary films under discussion. Using Kristevan terms, Modleski suggests that though Lisa appears caught in 'hysterical time', condemned to compulsive reminiscence through an incapacity for remembrance 'proper', a closer reading of *Letter From An Unknown Woman* reveals that it is Stefan, rather than Lisa, who 'is the one who truly suffers from reminiscences'.⁴ Modleski accounts for Stefan's 'existence of meaningless repetition'⁵ in relation to an incapacity to acknowledge loss – the loss of castration and of mortality itself. Only at the end of the film does Stefan enter history, which is also to accept 'the binding power of the word and the sway of death'.⁶ Modleski's argument links masculine 'hysteria' to an inability to enter what she calls history and to the denial of symbolic castration – a denial that entails the denial of embodiedness, of time and of mortality. Such denials arguably characterize the narcissism of the Oedipal second stage, rather than the full entry into 'history' characterized by the Oedipal third stage. Steve Neale's 1982 essay on contemporary representations of masculinity suggested that until very recently, mainstream cinema has sustained a masculine identification with the idealized father of the second stage, leaving the more chastened version of the third stage as an only partially realized possibility.⁷ Writing in the same year, however, Pam Cook suggested that such

2 Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 151. Flinn's list includes *Big* (Penny Marshall, 1988) and *Back To The Future* (Robert Zemeckis, 1985). It is while reading *Big* in relation to masculine regression that Tania Modleski refers to Lyotard's notion of 'the suffering of time', to which I refer later in this essay: see Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Postfeminist' Age* (New York: Routledge, 1991) especially pp. 90–111. The present essay is indebted to this analysis.

3 Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia*, pp. 150–51.

4 Tania Modleski, 'Time and desire in the woman's film', in Christine Gledhill, *Home Is Where The Heart Is: Studies In Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), p. 331.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., p. 330.

7 Steve Neale, 'Chariots Of Fire: images of men', *Screen*, vol. 23, nos. 3–4 (1982), p. 50.

8 See Pam Cook, 'Masculinity in crisis?', *Screen* vol. 23, nos 3-4 (1982), pp. 39-46. For a brief review of debates concerning masculinity's arguable crisis see: Susannah Radstone, 'Too straight a drive to the toll-booth: masculinity, mortality and Al Pacino', in Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim (eds), *Me Jane: Masculinity, Movies and Men* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, forthcoming).

9 Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism', *New Left Review*, no. 146 (1989), pp. 53-92; Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and consumer society', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto, 1985), pp. 111-25.

10 Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 5.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

idealized (and pathological) versions of masculinity might well be under threat: 'masculinity in crisis?' as she put it.⁸ In their place, she suggested, we might find representations which mourn that idealized, phallic masculinity. Following this path, an analysis of *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes* might focus on whether their rememberings of boyhood constitute a nostalgic elegy for a lost idealized father, or a memory-production from the side of 'history', as described by Modleski: nostalgia, or 'historical remembrance'?

A second theoretical approach to these two films takes as its starting point their fascination with cinema, together with their ubiquitous deployment of cinematic quotation. Here, the space they occupy appears to be that of postmodernism. This approach shifts attention away from feminist readings of masculinity towards the politics of postmodern representational strategies. One influential arm of this debate questions contemporary culture's capacity to grasp its own present and to construct its history, through competing analyses of postmodern quotation. Fredric Jameson's critique of postmodern culture⁹ suggests a reading of *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes* as 'pastiche' and 'nostalgia'. According to Jameson, these twin features of our contemporary culture register nothing short of a crisis at the heart of the subject and of society. For Jameson, postmodernism's quotations pastiche the past, providing evidence for a contemporary historicism which substitutes for our contemporary culture's incapacity to represent both history and present conditions. Jameson's analysis of postmodernism has been contested by, amongst others, Linda Hutcheon who insists on the resolute historicity of postmodernism. Hutcheon finds postmodernism's capacity for history in novels such as Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983) which she calls 'historiographic metafiction': novels which are both 'intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically lay claim to historical events and personages'.¹⁰ Stephen Gyllenhaal's recently released screen adaptation of Swift's *Waterland* (US/UK, 1991) provides us with yet another recent example of the cinematic remembrance of a troubled boyhood. Hutcheon lambasts Jameson for failing to note what she sees as postmodern historiographic metafiction's ironic intertextual parodying of generic conventions and traditions. Contra Jameson, Hutcheon proposes, then, that postmodernism does not deny the existence of the past '[though] it does question whether it can ever be known other than through its textual remains'.¹¹

Jameson's most well-known example of postmodern pastiche is the 'nostalgia film', one subcategory of which he identifies as the 'history/nostalgia' film in which mise-en-scene, costume and period props substitute period style for history. In our time, argues Jameson, nostalgia-work substitutes for a fully historical grasp of both the present and the past. Following Jameson, *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes* might be placed alongside *Chinatown*

(Roman Polanski, 1974), or *The Conformist* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1969) – two of Jameson's nostalgia films. Most strikingly, though, we might draw parallels here between *The Long Day Closes*, *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Last Picture Show* (Peter Bogdanovich, 1971), which, like the two films under discussion, associates the cinema with the loss of the father. Both *Waterland* and *The Long Day Closes* construct memory through the strategies of the history/nostalgia film, and by evoking a variety of cinematic styles and genres. In place of the splicing of actual film footage into the diegesis deployed by *The Long Day Closes* and *Cinema Paradiso*, *Waterland* offers us representations of the sites of historical events, motivated by the slides Crick shows his pupils.

The dispute between Hutcheon and Jameson rests on two conflicting understandings of, and attitudes to, history. Jameson clearly mourns the loss of a Marxist history, with its capacity for transcendence and 'objectivity', while Hutcheon celebrates postmodernism's problematizing of such claims for history. Following this path, my question concerning *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes* asks: are they Jamesonian nostalgia-work, or Hutcheon's 'history'? And this is a question that we might explore through analyzing their deployment of cinema clips as history and as memory.

Both the paths sketched so far could lead to differently nuanced versions of the opposition nostalgia/memory. Both films do indeed encourage a reading as memory by means of their claims to autobiography. Both *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes* purport to *remember* boyhoods through the device of visual and/or aural film quotation. Davies's *The Long Day Closes* has been widely acknowledged, not least by Davies himself, as either the second (or, if *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* is regarded as two separate films, the third) part of an autobiographical cinematic trilogy.¹² Though *Cinema Paradiso* has not been marketed as autobiographical, a reading of the film as autobiography is supported by the revelation at its end that the central protagonist becomes 'something big' in the film business, together with review commentary that Tornatore returned to 'his own birthplace to make the film'.¹³ The films therefore announce themselves as memory. Thus whether we follow the direction in which the films appear to point, or take either of the theoretical paths traced so far, our steps lead us to the same point: that of memory.

The evidence of memory's centrality within contemporary feminist, postmodernist and literary theory, as well as within history, is too extensive to catalogue here. Memory provides a focus for attempts to historicize theories of the subject – particularly those of psychoanalysis. Analyses and theories of memory condense, too, questions concerning the textual production of subjectivity, hence its centrality in literary studies follows from the recent explosive

¹² See John Caughie, 'Half way to paradise', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1992), p. 11.

¹³ Tom Milne, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 57, no. 674 (1990), p. 72.

interest in autobiography. So too, 'new' history – history's attempt to come to terms with poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and postmodernism – has heralded memory-work, particularly Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986) and Ronald Fraser's *In Search of a Past* (1984) – as founding texts. If the impact of the 'isms' in the 1970s and early 1980s led to a focus on the subject which appeared to replace the omnipotence of History with the grandiosity of Theory, in the 1990s memory promises to chasten the excesses of both by historicizing Theory, and by curtailing History's claims to objectivity and omniscience. Memory emerges as the fruit of a fertile encounter between History and Theory. This more than accidental trope associates memory with an event in 'natural history' – a term recently re-emerging in discussions of memory due to a renewed interest in the work of Walter Benjamin.

The introduction to *New Formation's* special edition on Walter Benjamin¹⁴ points to the centrality of questions of memory and temporality in his work. 'In a century in which memory has been more than ever before under threat', it argues, 'Benjamin offers us a body of work in which the demands of modernity are investigated alongside the ethical demands of memory. To be in memory of Benjamin . . . is to be in memory of the fragile value of memory itself.'¹⁵ The questions posed by both the theoretical approaches I have suggested in relation to *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes* centre on whether the films might best be read as memory or as nostalgia; terms which reappear in this introduction to Benjamin's work, where Laura Marcus and Lynda Nead liken memory to mourning and history to melancholy (in this context, psychoanalysis understands nostalgia as a form of melancholy). Benjamin's work certainly provides a focus for the questions about memory and history, mourning and nostalgia that have been raised in this essay. But those questions have been raised in two registers: in the registers of postmodernist and feminist theory. I have already gestured towards Benjamin's use of the term 'natural history'. This essay will now deploy this term to analyse *The Long Day Closes* and *Cinema Paradiso* in relation to both the feminist and the postmodern variants of the memory/nostalgia opposition: oppositions which in both cases work to underline memory's 'fragile value'.

In places, Benjamin's writing appears to accept the inevitable loss of auratic experience in the modern age – a position that is most commonly associated with his essay 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction'.¹⁶ In this vein, Benjamin argues that the crowded city and the machine – signs of modernity – left the modern city-dweller unable to 'assimilate the data of the world around him by way of experience'.¹⁷ The mode of experience Benjamin believed to be on the wane was that which he called *Erfahrung*: a formulation of experience which is aligned not with immediacy, but with memory.¹⁸ For Benjamin, true experience is the recollection, or

14 'The actuality of Walter Benjamin', *New Formations*, no. 20 (1993), pp. v–viii.

15 *Ibid.*, p. vi.

16 Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction' in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, pp. 217–25. Miriam Hansen has argued that contrary to received opinion, even the 'Artwork' essay looks relatively favourably upon, and is guardedly optimistic concerning, the possibilities for auratic experience in the modern world: see Miriam Hansen, 'Benjamin, cinema and experience: "The blue flower in the land of technology"', *New German Critique*, vol. 40, Winter (1987), pp. 179–224.

17 Benjamin, 'On some motifs in Baudelaire', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, p. 158.

18 Tomoko Masuzawa, 'Tracing the figure of redemption: Walter Benjamin's physiognomy of modernity', *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 100, no. 3 (1985), p. 519.

reworking of memory-traces. Here, Benjamin's starting point is Freud's proposition concerning memory and consciousness. Acknowledging Freud, Benjamin argues that 'becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory-trace are processes incompatible with each other within one and the same system . . . memory-fragments are often most powerful and enduring when the incident which left them behind was one that never entered consciousness.'¹⁹ From this perspective, consciousness receives no memory-traces. Its task is to protect against stimuli – to parry the shocks and guard against trauma.²⁰ Benjamin believed that this function was being overstretched due to the 'excessive energies' at work in the modern world.²¹ In modernity's external world of cities, crowds and machines, shock had become the norm.²² Survival necessitated learning to tolerate a 'brave new world' of constant shocks. Benjamin believed that cinema functioned as a form of schooling in shock: 'Technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training. Eventually there came a day when a new and urgent need for stimuli was met by the film. In film, perception in the form of shock was established as a formal principle.'²³ Though Benjamin is both nostalgic and pessimistic about the possibilities for *Erfahrung* in the modern world, the writers he admired – particularly Proust and Baudelaire – were artists who were struggling to 'manufacture' a modern *Erfahrung* for a modern world. He understands their struggle as that of trying to produce memory under modernity's siege conditions. If Benjamin's 'Artwork' essay appears almost to celebrate the loss of auratic experience, other essays, particularly those on Baudelaire and 'The storyteller' make clear his hope that it might be redeemed.²⁴

The 'aura' plays an essential part in Benjamin's formulation of *Erfahrung* as experience/memory-recollection. Benjamin's notion of the aura's place in this formulation of experience-as-memory also provides the link between the feminist and the postmodern formulations of memory which I wish to bring together here. In 'The storyteller', Benjamin describes the processes at stake in the lost art of storytelling. Storytelling, which Benjamin describes as the communication of experience-as-memory, depends upon an auratic relation of reciprocity between teller and listener. Benjamin defines auratic experience, which he understands as 'the anticipated reciprocity of the gaze',²⁵ in relation to the experience of gazing at distant natural objects: 'If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch'.²⁶ Miriam Hansen points out that though Benjamin defines the aura as a returned gaze, he explains the experience in relation to inanimate nature. What, she asks, is the nature of the human element in auratic experience that allows its transference to 'inanimate' nature? She answers her question thus:

¹⁹ Benjamin, 'On some motifs in Baudelaire', p. 160. Here, Benjamin is quoting from Freud.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, esp. p. 162–3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 162.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

²⁴ But see note 16.

²⁵ Hansen, 'Benjamin, cinema and experience', p. 187.

²⁶ Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', pp. 222–223.

27 Hansen, 'Benjamin, cinema and experience', p. 212. Hansen's formulation concerning auratic experience refers here to an analysis of Benjamin's use of the term *aura* to be found in Marleen Stoessel, *Aura, das vergessene Menschliche: Zu Sprache und Erfahrung bei Walter Benjamin*, (Munich: Hanser, 1983).

28 Benjamin, 'The storyteller', p. 93.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

30 From this point onwards, my argument concerning Benjaminian *Erfahrung*, the auratic gaze and the chastening of narcissistic excess is indebted to Eric Santner's *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990). My essay introduces into Santner's model of a chastening auratic gaze a consideration of how that gaze might chasten specifically masculine narcissistic fantasies. Though Eric Santner reads Benjamin in the context of Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Freud's analysis of the social origins of patriarchy, he omits discussion of whether or not the chastened gaze *Stranded Objects* advocates would chasten patriarchal masculinity.

31 Benjamin, 'The storyteller', p. 98.

'that forgotten human element . . . is nothing but the material origin – and *finality* – that humans share with non-human nature.'²⁷ (emphasis mine) In his appreciation of the lost art of storytelling, Benjamin stresses the significance of an awareness of finality, of temporality and consequently of mortality, to the lost capacity to tell and listen to stories. Benjamin understands this relation as 'auratic': the storytelling presupposes, or anticipates the returned 'gaze' of the listener. That reciprocal gaze is enabled, then, through a common recognition of mortality, finality, temporality. It is this recognition which grounds the communicability of *Erfahrung*. Benjamin argues that the repetitive and boring tasks of the lost crafts provided the optimum conditions for listening to stories, pointing to the 'shock-free' conditions in which such work took place. He argues that the length of the story has become abbreviated due to 'the decline of the idea of eternity', explaining that 'The idea of eternity has ever had its strongest source in death'.²⁸ Most importantly, Benjamin argues that the storyteller's authority, his capacity to provoke recognition – the experience of the reciprocated gaze – stems from death itself: 'Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death. In other words, it is natural history to which his stories refer back'.²⁹ Here we arguably find a formulation of *Erfahrung* (experience as memory) which meets both feminist and postmodernist criteria for memory.³⁰ *Erfahrung* chastens masculinity's denials of temporality and of death as denials which produce 'hysterical' narcissism. Likewise, Benjamin's 'Storyteller' essay suggests that the auratic transmission of stories (the communication of *Erfahrung*) chastens History's idealizing narcissism. Comparing the novel with storytelling, Benjamin contrasts 'the perpetuating remembrance of the novelist . . . with the short-lived reminiscences of the storyteller. The first is dedicated to *one* hero, *one* odyssey, *one* battle; the second to *many* diffuse occurrences. . . .'³¹ Storytelling's memory displaces History's illusory narcissism ('one hero') with the chastening recognition of multiplicity, and thereby cures, as it were, the 'perpetual remembrance' of the hysteric.

Whether we approach *Cinema Paradiso* via the path of feminist inquiry or via that of debates concerning postmodernism and history, it now appears that what looked like two differently nuanced sets of questions may converge at the same point: that of *Erfahrung*. Benjamin locates *Erfahrung* in a lost and irretrievable past beyond modernity's shock conditions. For Benjamin, the cinema constituted not a vehicle for *Erfahrung*, but one of the sites of its erosion. Do *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes* manufacture *Erfahrung* on this very site? Do they negotiate what looks like an impasse by making cinema not the block to, but the vehicle for *Erfahrung*? Or do they nostalgically evoke the unchastened narcissism of History and of masculinity?

John Caughie's review article of *The Long Day Closes* compares Davies's oeuvre to Bill Douglas's autobiographical trilogy *My Childhood* (1972), *My Ain Folk* (1973), and *My Way Home* (1978). Caughie argues that while Douglas's work is rigorously autobiographical, at least to the extent that it is rooted in his own lived past. Davies is 'deliberately making autobiographical fiction, or at the very least is displacing autobiography on to his older brothers and sisters'.³² Caughie stresses the importance of this distinction by relating it to broader questions of experience, memory and history: 'Douglas tried to reconstruct experience in images which simultaneously materialise particularities and generalise communalities' . . . while Davies 'deconstructs family memories, his images and sounds part of a *musée imaginaire*, a memory-trace which is only the distant trace of a particular experience'.³³ 'What makes *The Long Day Closes* interesting', he goes on, 'is the attempt to construct the past of individual experience through a museum of collective traces . . . what it risks is that everything becomes an exhibit'.³⁴ In light of the previous discussion of Benjaminian *Erfahrung*, Caughie's commentary seems to propose that Douglas's cinematic construction of memory comes closer to *Erfahrung* than does Davies's work, which, he seems to suggest, is further from *Erfahrung*: 'a memory-trace that is only the distant trace of a particular experience'.³⁵ Caughie's reading proposes, then, that Douglas's rigorously autobiographical work (paradoxically) builds bridges between particularity and commonality, memory and history: a bridge-building that presupposes, one might add, *Erfahrung*'s chastening of narcissism through the recognition of shared human conditions best exemplified by the intransigence of temporality and mortality. In what reads rather like an echo of earlier left theorizations and celebrations of particular realisms – Luckacs and then Raymond Williams – Caughie seems to propose that what Douglas achieves is a 'memory-realism'. That Davies's designer termed *The Long Day Closes* 'memory-realism'³⁶ now appears paradoxical in light of Caughie's reading of the film, which suggests we approach it as flawed or 'arrested' *Erfahrung*, as *Erfahrung* that tips back into History. In what follows, I will be broadly agreeing with Caughie's reading, as well as applying it to both *Cinema Paradiso* and *Waterland*. But my reading suggests that this 'turning everything into an exhibit' – into History – constitutes not the flaw but the project of the films discussed here.

Both *The Long Day Closes* and *Cinema Paradiso* remember boyhoods largely by means of cinematic quotation. In *Cinema Paradiso* cinema clips are spliced into the film's diegesis. *The Long Day Closes* combines aural clips with the visual evocation of earlier film styles. These two films, as well as *Waterland*, deploy clips within a remembrance constructed through flashback. The question of whether these films produce memory as *Erfahrung* – of whether they

³² Caughie, 'Halfway to paradise', p. 11.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁶ Pat Kirkham and Michael O'Shaughnessy, 'Designing desire', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1992), p. 14.

manufacture *Erfahrung* through postmodern strategies – rests, then; on a reading of their ‘quotations’ in the context of their flashback structures and enunciative modes.

The flashback structures of *The Long Day Closes*, *Cinema Paradiso* (and *Waterland*) cue us to read their diegeses as *discursively* rather than as historically enounced.³⁷ The opposition between Benveniste’s discursive and historic categories of enunciation correlates with this essay’s analytic opposition between *Erfahrung* and History/nostalgia. Historic enunciation denies its selectivity, partiality and limitations by means of strategies through which it presents its version of events as ‘always already there’. Discursive enunciation, on the other hand, lays bare its partiality, limitation and selectivity by associating its viewpoint not with the always-already-thereness of History, but with the situated, and therefore fallible, perspective of a chastened individual viewpoint. Discourse, then, might be understood as *Erfahrung*’s enunciative mode. Are the postmodern enunciative modes of *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes* discursive, then, or do they slide back into History?

Both John Caughie and Tom Milne have decried the ‘lack of history’ in their respective objects of criticism. In *Cinema Paradiso* there is ‘not a breath of fascism in the air’,³⁸ and in *The Long Day Closes* nothing about Hungary or Suez.³⁹ The absence of these events from the narratives of the films discussed is certainly irrefutable, and rightly looms large where the focus of critical attention falls on the construction of nation and of national political history constructed by cinema. In place of such history, however, both *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes* construct versions of *cinema* history: cinematic historiographies of film to which a longer paper would justifiably attend. Here, though, there is space only to gesture towards *Cinema Paradiso*’s romp through European art classics, Italian potboilers and Hollywood Westerns, and *The Long Day Closes*’s aural and visual tour around Hollywood and Ealing. In the present essay, I want to focus this question of history’s presence or absence on the functioning of the spliced clips within the apparently discursive enunciation of both *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes*. How do these clips function in relation to both films’ subjective flashback structures – structures which arguably cue us to read them as *Erfahrung* rather than History?

If the films propose a reading of their enounced as discourse, my proposal is that the clips contradict that proposal by tipping the direction of our reading back towards the historic. The processes of recognition motivated by discursive enunciation are those of ‘similarity’ rather than ‘sameness’. The grounds of the similarity recognized in discursive enunciation are those that enable the transmission of Benjaminian auratic experience – that enable, that

37 Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971).

38 Milne, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, p. 72.

39 Caughie, ‘Halfway to paradise’, p. 13.

is, the communication of *Erfahrung* as memory. In discursive enunciation, recognition is grounded in the shared human predicaments of limitation, partiality, fallibility: predicaments underwritten, as it were, by the common awareness of human finitude in death. Spectatorial discursive recognition gives the lie to any possibility of identity or sameness of experience through its acknowledgement of these shared human limitations. Conversely, the recognition upon which historic enunciation rests denies these limitations through its production precisely of an *identification* which substitutes *sameness* for *similarity*. Discursive enunciation, then, might be likened to a 'chastened gaze'⁴⁰ which sees beyond the illusory identities of phallic masculinity and History – identities which arguably ground nostalgia.

In *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes*, the spliced clips arguably upset both films' production of discursive recognition by the strength of their insistence on 'sameness'. As I have already noted, Benjamin described the cinema's functioning as a training in shock. The cinema trains us, that is, to live in a world where the possibility for auratic experience is minimal. Certainly the *clips* can be understood as eliciting spectatorial shock: a shock grounded in identity/sameness, rather than in recognition/similarity. Moreover, it is the clips recognizability *as* clips which paradoxically sunders the fragile recognitions necessary for the production of *Erfahrung* by 'legitimizing' the films' discursive enunciation as 'H'istoric (not to say hysterical). Suddenly we 'recognize' Jean Gabin, or *La Terra Trema*, John Wayne or Margaret Rutherford, seen, not through the lens of discourse, but spliced into the acetate strip of History. It is our recognition of these clips *as* clips, rather than as discourse – the vehicle for *Erfahrung* – which 'guarantees' these memories as History. The spliced clips produce the readerly satisfactions and stabilities of identification's two senses. We identify the clips, and simultaneously identify with the illusory ideals of historic enunciation. Quite the reverse, if you like, of a postmodern aesthetic which disturbs History's certainties. Contra Hutcheon, then, I am arguing that in the cases of *The Long Day Closes* and *Cinema Paradiso*, postmodern quotation does anything but point up the constructedness of all narratives, be they 'History' or 'story'. Neither do the clips aid in a collective remembering that might run counter to History. In a world in which media images constitute both 'the real' and 'the past', our recognition of these clips legitimates these filmic memories as 'Historic'. A far cry from the *conflation* of discursive and historic enunciation that Hutcheon, for one, associates with the 'progressive' postmodern text.⁴¹

A fleeting glance at the narratives of *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes* confirms their memories as nostalgia – nostalgia for a lost ideal of phallic masculinity and nostalgia *in place of* *Erfahrung* or memory as auratic experience. In both films, nostalgia

40 See note 30.

41 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 92.

is attached not just to films and stars, but to the lost *communities* which constituted cinema audiences. At first glance, it might appear that this nostalgia for a community of cinemagoers might be likened to Benjamin's nostalgia for the lost communities within which the auratic gaze could be reciprocated, death acknowledged and *Erfahrung* communicated. But here, it is the identificatory gaze rather than the auratic gaze of recognition and reciprocity that appears to be the object of the films' nostalgia. The remembered sequences that form the basis of Toto's and Bud's nostalgic reminiscences motivate a gaze at and a remembrance of larger-than-life stars – mainly male heroes. Thus, nostalgia here is for the ideals that ground phallic masculinity and History, and not for the living communities within which those ideals could be gently laid to rest. Toto and Bud look back lovingly, then, to a time before masculinity and History entered crisis.⁴²

Cinema Paradiso suggests that given the current crisis, the Oedipal promise is itself broken, or at best sustainable only as nostalgia. Alfredo, the village projectionist who substitutes for Toto's missing father, decides to project a highly popular film onto the walls of the village, rather than within the cinema itself. For a moment, then, Alfredo allows the ideal figures of narcissistic imagination to people the 'real world', thus placing the boundaries between such ideals and 'the real' in crisis. For this Alfredo is punished with blindness: the cinema catches fire and though Toto rescues Alfredo from the flames, his 'father' never sees again. The film stages, then, not the entry into the Oedipal third stage, but a rebellious refusal to accept its chastening structures, the classical punishment for which is blindness. Classically, too, this arrest forecloses on the Oedipal promise. Like Stefan, the 'hero' of *Letter From An Unknown Woman*, the adult Toto appears unable to forge a lasting relationship. On Alfredo's death, the adult Toto, now a famous filmmaker, returns for the first time to his village birthplace where he is given Alfredo's parting gift, a spool of film. This film constitutes not an object of Oedipal exchange – a promise in return for the giving up of phallic narcissism – but a nostalgic evocation of impossible, ideal fantasies of heterosexuality. Alfredo's gift is a film made from the out-takes censored by the priest from the films Alfredo screened. The adult Toto leans back in a velvet seat, alone, for a screening of this film which splices together the embraces and kisses of countless cinema romances. Toto weeps, but his tears are perhaps less the tears that resolve a passage – tears of catharsis – than the tears that accompany a pathos more usually associated with melodrama, rather than with the nostalgia film. Steve Neale has argued that the tears of pathos accompany an acknowledgement of time's vicissitudes. We cry when things come too late, rather than not at all.⁴³ At the end of *Cinema Paradiso*, then, Toto's tears acknowledge the 'impossible timing' represented by Alfredo's gift,

⁴² The question of whether, in fact, 'crisis' is the most appropriate term to describe the current conjuncture is far too large to be addressed here, but two interjections might nevertheless be made. Firstly, regarding masculinity, Steve Neale has argued that the ubiquitous cinematic *testing* of patriarchal masculinity by mainstream film should not be mistaken for a *crisis* in masculinity; see Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as spectacle', *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 6 (1983), p. 6. The question of History's alleged 'crisis' is of course contested by those who argue for the continued vitality and usefulness of Enlightenment forms of knowledge production: see, for instance, Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity: an incomplete project', in Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture*.

⁴³ Steve Neale, 'Melodrama and tears', *Screen*, vol. 27, no. 6 (1986), pp. 6–22.

which could have formed part of the illusory completion of the Oedipal process, but that can only take place in the unreachable past of nostalgic desire.

Like *Cinema Paradiso*, *The Long Day Closes* ends not with a wedding, but with the cinema and its compensatory pleasures. *The Long Day Closes* may be suffused with cinematic quotation, but the spectator rarely follows Bud into the cinema. Only in the final shot of the film do we share Bud's gaze at the screen. Once again, this film gives the audience the opportunity to share with its male protagonist a gaze at the cinema screen. And here again, the shot's combination of extremely beautiful music – the song 'The long day closes' – with a look towards the night sky framed as though projected onto a screen, engenders a powerfully pathetic affect. So that here as well, perhaps, tears spring from time's vicissitudes. The final shot blurs the boundaries between 'natural history' and cinema's mechanical manipulations of time: is Bud outside 'in the world' or inside the cinema? The film's ending seems to suggest that for Bud this uncertain state is his fate, and we cry.

The endings of both *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes* therefore condense nostalgia for lost ideals with a pathos that suggests a wish that things might be different. Though undoubtedly 'in question', phallic masculinity remains in place and History shores itself up against the incoming tide of memory. In *Waterland*, the difference of Crick's history lessons is evoked through metaphors of Fenland geography, of dredging and of marshland. *Waterland's* take-up of this conventional troping of memory as water, or as tide, appears celebratory. In what follows, however, *Waterland* will be placed alongside *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes*. I have argued so far that the enunciative strategies of the latter two films ultimately defer entry into 'natural history' and thus put up a rearguard defence of History's and patriarchal masculinity's narcissism. Though *Waterland's* enunciative rhetoric, with its apparently appreciative tropings of memory appears to undermine such a project, its narrative arguably contradicts such a reading, ultimately placing it alongside *Cinema Paradiso* and *The Long Day Closes*. This means that what at first looks like a hymn to *Erfahrung* turns out to elegize both History and patriarchal masculinity.

Waterland's suffering hero Crick, (yet another pale, hangdog role for the ever-tortured Jeremy Irons) is a history teacher in crisis. At work his pupils are restless. One young man, Price, challenges Crick, asking him: 'What's the point of all this when History is coming to an end?' And his crisis is further compounded when he returns home from work one day to discover that his wife, who is infertile due to an earlier abortion, has stolen a baby from outside a supermarket. These pressures lead Crick to begin teaching what one critic calls 'a different sort of history – the story of his own boyhood'.⁴⁴ Under the sway of Price's challenge and of the crisis at

⁴⁴ Richard Combs, *Sight and Sound*, vol. 2, no. 5 (1992), p. 61.

home, Crick sweats, stammers, and begins to tell not the story of the French Revolution, but the story of his family history, his boyhood in the Fens and his childhood romance. Certainly, Crick's 'different history', with its blurring of boundaries between the French Revolution, World Wars I and II and memories of boyhood, might be mistaken for the cinematic manufacture of *Erfahrung*. But, as has already been suggested, these cinematic memories are constituted through the codes and conventions of the 'nostalgia film'. This boundary-blurring might be seen as problematizing History's conventional subject matter, and Crick's discursive telling of his memories to his pupils might also be seen as challenging History's status as the omniscient and the 'always already there'. By way of conclusion, however, I want to suggest an alternative reading of *Waterland*.

Certainly, the film problematizes the certainties of History and of paternal inheritance and phallic masculinity. Crick's story is concerned with uncertain paternity, trauma and termination. He tells of his mentally disabled brother, the offspring of his grandfather's incestuous affair with his mother. He tells of his own youthful affair with the girl who is now his wife, her pregnancy and his uncertainty concerning the child's father: could his brother have fathered his girlfriend's baby? He then tells of the pregnancy's termination which leaves his girlfriend unable to bear children. In *Waterland*, fears about the end of History are associated with the termination of a pregnancy and doubts and anxieties about paternity. But what do these associations tell us? Anxieties about paternity condense questions concerning History's authority with a crisis of the paternal signifier.⁴⁵ Though *Waterland* certainly registers these crises, it does anything but work them through.

About halfway through *Waterland*, Crick begins a History class with a discussion of the French Revolution. At one point, he projects slides of the French Revolution onto the classroom wall. As he walks forwards, breaking the path of the projector's beam of light, the image of the guillotine falls on his back. His pupils ask him whether this Enlightenment machine was really a kinder way to die and Crick responds that we cannot know since the machine has silenced its victims. For a moment, Crick's body registers a sign that connotes both entry into 'natural history' (the blade) and the freezing of that blade's fall by History. For a moment, Crick bears this contradiction. But out of this crisis comes not a 'different sort of history' but the same old story. Crick begins to talk about his wife's termination. He speaks for Mary, his wife, telling the story of the termination in terms of her, rather than his, body. And it is her body that becomes the site for his displaced anxieties concerning loss, termination and the end of 'History'. Tania Modleski has borrowed Lyotard's phrase 'the suffering of time' to describe that which patriarchal masculinity continues to displace onto others. In

⁴⁵ See Barbara Creed, 'From here to modernity: feminism and postmodernism', *Screen*, vol. 28, no. 2 (1987), p. 52.

all these films, in *Cinema Paradiso*, *Waterland* and *The Long Day Closes*, that suffering is refused. Instead of a share in it, we are offered the pathetic tears that History and an unchastened masculinity shed as they gaze nostalgically back to a time that never really was, or forward to a time that they fear to enter, since it is no longer theirs.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Modleski, 'Time and desire in the woman's film', p. 110.

'A live commercial for icing sugar.' **Researching the historical** **audience: gender and broadcast** **television in the 1950s**

JANET THUMIM

In its routine review of the previous evening's broadcasting, following a couple of references to programmes (ITV's Frank Owen in a *Personal Call* on Alan Herbert, and BBC's *Looking at Cardiff* which was 'so dull') the *News Chronicle* of 29 October 1955 had the following memorable sentence:

Miss Elizabeth Allan forgot her lines in a 'live' commercial for icing sugar.

Why, for a researcher exploring the early development of television and with an eye for signs of the cultural construction of the feminine, does this little sentence jump off the page? Like a Barthesian 'punctum' it seemed to me to contain traces of lost significance, to reference long forgotten assumptions. Trembling on the brink of obscurity it seems to signpost an almost effaced landscape: what, I want to ask, constituted this landscape?

Judging from the abundant public discussion of broadcast television – a discussion which had gained momentum following the July 1954 passage of the Television Act – one of the attributes of television most valued at the time was its potential for immediacy. What you see is happening now, as you see it; despite the increasing use of imported, repeated and recorded material, in 1955 television was still special because of its capacity for spontaneity. This feature

of broadcasting is doubly referenced here: we are told that the commercial was 'live' (in inverted commas, I think, to distinguish it from the even more live theatre stage performance) and, in case we are not convinced, we are also told that Ms Allan forgot her lines. It is her error which verifies the simultaneity of her performance and the audience's witnessing of it: the audience sees her forgetting in the same moment that she forgets. In this way, the authenticity of the event represented is assured and the specificity of broadcast television – it is not radio, not film, not theatre – is brought to the readers' attention. Thus the audience itself is, by implication, invoked.

But in 1955, though the daily experience of television itself was still a new and thrilling experience for the majority, there was also a heightened sensitivity to the possible social consequences of this form of broadcasting following the introduction, in September 1955, of the commercial second channel. *Picture Post*, for example, in its special issue celebrating the advent of 'independent' television, suggested that, 'It is no exaggeration to say that this is the most important event in British entertainment since the war'.¹

Broadcasting was no longer solely a public service but a source of private – more accurately, corporate – profit, and the BBC was henceforward to be subject to competition from the ITA. The possibilities of this innovation were a major subject for debates which proceeded directly from a discussion of the enlivening or debasing consequences of competition for programme quality, to a broader consideration of the development – its invigoration or stultification – of the cultural life of the nation. Hence comment on a broadcast commercial, live or otherwise, in a review of the evening's viewing, entails a reference to this ubiquitous preoccupation with national culture. The fact that it is a commercial for icing sugar – a superficial, probably superfluous and certainly decorative, if not downright frivolous, commodity – would alert the readers of this column to these debates. Television's immediacy, the recent advent of commercial television and fears about transatlantic dilution of British culture: all these issues are alluded to, for the contemporary television viewer, in this passing reference to Ms Allan's incompetent performance. For the historian, however, there is more half-hidden material to be excavated. The phrase 'forgot her lines in a live commercial' conjures an image of a television studio teeming with technicians, a gallery supervising the transmission of the signal, advertising agencies investing in a new form of marketing, anxiously monitoring their investment – not to mention Ms Allan herself, who was supposed to have learned her lines. In other words, here is the world of work.

Here it is, I think, that we approach the interesting and central paradox of broadcast television, a paradox that is particularly significant for the cultural construction of gender, in itself a rather

¹ *Picture Post*, 24 September 1955, p. 3.

2 See, for example, Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (London: Allen Lane, 1974).

less obvious form of work performed, we might surmise, by broadcast television. Though both the programmes' own address and the discursive context in which they are embedded assume that production equals work and consumption (reception) equals leisure, this is not quite true. For while the television studio, the outside broadcast van or the transmission station is a workplace, so too is the site of reception, the home. In addressing the commercial for icing sugar to the domestic audience, the advertisers are using their new access to the airwaves to solicit the attention of the nation's purchasers, those entrusted with keys to the larders, kitchens and housekeeping budgets. This meant the women. What I think I can see, as a feminist historian in the 1990s peering back to this landscape of the mid 1950s, is not only signs of the unsurprising, well-known and freely acknowledged women's work of managing and supplying the home but also signs of that other work that is denied in ideology. This is the work of reproducing not only the workforce itself² but also the ideology which sustains the social divisions of power and authority, that is patriarchal ideology. The *News Chronicle's* report of the television commercial contains not only a grudging acknowledgement of women's work (the female performer is a working actor and the female addressee, keeper of the kitchen purse, is a working manager) but also, and simultaneously, a denigration of that work. For the performer is incompetent (she forgot her lines), and the woman viewing from her workplace, the home, is potentially frivolous in the discharge of her responsibilities (she might spend the housekeeping money on icing sugar). In the mid 1950s, briefly, the crucial but hidden work that patriarchal order assigns to the feminine is acknowledged in the way in which the emergent structures and discourses of television broadcasting addressed their female audience; this acknowledgement is at its clearest in the period immediately following the introduction of commercial broadcasting because the necessary competition for audiences entailed some pretty direct prioritizing of the statutorily limited weekly transmission time. The working woman at home, a woman who, it is also frequently acknowledged, may also be working outside the home, contributing to if not solely providing for the family's income, is thus *present* in the televisual discourses of 1955–6, though it is a momentary presence. She is directly addressed in regular weekday programming on both channels, and her managerial functions are acknowledged both in the content and scope of 'women's programmes' and in the organization of the schedules themselves.

But as much recent feminist work on the politics of gender has suggested, patriarchal guarantees of the primacy of the masculine require that the feminine operates as its other; the feminine, in patriarchy, can be understood only as the boundary of the masculine. Although in terms of the immediate exigencies of

broadcasting's marketplace (both the market *on* television and the market *for* television) an emphasis on the autonomous agency of women, what we might call woman's *presence*, made sense, it must also have set up tensions which could only be resolved by demeaning women, that is to say by affirming the marginality of the feminine. Perhaps this imperative underlies the routine use of denigratory terminology as, for example, in Reginald Pound's *Listener* comment on the two major outside broadcast events of the previous week, the Rainier-Kelly wedding in Monaco and the Bulganin Krushev visit to London.

Like the popular newspapers, BBC television surrendered to the irresistible pressure of 'feminine interest' in the wedding at Monte Carlo and gave it priority of attention over the visit of the Russian leaders, which may turn out to be the more important event in the history of nations.³

At the end of the decade, programming specifically addressed to women disappeared from the schedules, the spaces filled by Outside Broadcast sports and by schools broadcasting. No doubt an examination of the BBC's Caversham archives or the production strategies of the various independent television companies would yield some other persuasive reasons for this scheduling decision. For the feminist historian, however, it remains a striking lacuna in the hegemonic renewals of the period. In order to maintain its hegemony, patriarchal order must ensure that the sign 'Woman' and its signified, 'the feminine', occupy the place of actual women in visible constructions of the social. Hence their absence, or at the very least their containment, is a necessary condition. The insistent presence on broadcast television during the 1950s of what I will refer to as 'real women', threatened to upset the crucial equation by means of which patriarchy sustains the masculine.

But *why* am I looking at television in the 1950s and, more to the point, *how* can I look at the institution of television in the 1950s since so many of its constituent parts are lost, only traces remaining, such as the trace of icing sugar with which I began. A feature of this decade was the rapid decline in cinema audiences and increase in the domestic television audience, measured in terms of receivers sold and television licences registered. Following my recent study of the representation of women in postwar British box-office hits,⁴ I wondered whether the repressive ideological work apparently being performed by popular cinema was also to be observed in the emergent forms of television. But the methods I had deployed in analyzing the institution of cinema were not much use in respect of broadcast television, partly because of the absence of many texts (the live commercial for icing sugar being one such) and partly because the televisual discourse was itself under construction during the 1950s. The various methods of measuring audience response to

3 *The Listener*, 26 April 1956, p. 524.

4 Janet Thumim, *Celluloid Sisters: Women and Popular Cinema* (London: Macmillan, 1992), and Janet Thumim, 'Film and female identity: questions of method in investigating representations of women in popular cinema' in Duncan Petrie (ed.), *New Scholarship Working Papers* (London: British Film Institute, 1995 forthcoming).

programming – BBC listener research, TAM and Nielsen ratings – were themselves the subject of debate and speculation and the transmitters, in 1955–6, had not yet achieved full ‘penetration’ (the industry’s own term) of the potential audience. An initial examination of the BBC scheduling pattern as it developed between 1950 and 1965 suggested that during the 1950s, at least, television operated rather differently in respect of the social construction of the feminine than cinema did at the same time. It was also clear that programming and scheduling were relatively experimental during the 1950s, and that during the early 1960s they settled into a pattern which still looks more or less familiar. There was a noticeable change in the ‘tone’ of the BBC’s *Radio Times* programme notes: during the decade these became markedly more informal and chatty. The afternoon programme for women on Tuesday 4 April 1950, for example, included a *Cookery Lesson* (3.00pm):

Philip Harben introduces a series of 12 lessons on the basic principle of cooking. 1: The importance of temperature.

Whereas ten years later, on Tuesday 24 May 1960, in *Cookery Club* (3.15pm):

Marguerite Patten introduces the winner of this month’s cookery competition and shows her suggestions for cooking in advance for a picnic.

Finally it is important not to lose sight of the simple fact that these ‘audiences’, though addressed differently by the institutions of cinema and of broadcasting, are, of course, likely to be more or less the same group of individual viewers – or at least to overlap substantially – increasingly so towards the end of the decade. The absence of any demographic finesse in contemporary audience measurements will probably ensure that the precise relation between these notional audiences remains a matter for speculation.

For all these reasons, then, my attention turned from cinema in the 1950s towards broadcast television, and this explains *why* I came to be browsing through the *News Chronicle*’s 1955 television reviews. This leaves the altogether more difficult question of *how* such research might be conducted: what questions can legitimately be posed, and what tasks might reasonably be undertaken with some possibility of a meaningful outcome. So I return to the audience, particularly the putative female audience which I find directly addressed both in the programme notes and in the schedules of both the BBC and the ITA. In the first issue of *TV Times*, announcing the *Morning Magazine* ‘special feature for women’, its editor Mary Hill outlined in some detail women’s supposed morning routines, asking, ‘Surely the woman at home, like any other worker, is entitled to, and needs, a mid-morning break?’⁵

In the 1950s the BBC used the mid-afternoon time slot for its

5 *TV Times*, 22 September–1 October 1955, p. 14.

women's programmes *Mainly For Women*, *About the Home*, and *Family Affairs*, and early in 1956 the ITV *Morning Magazine* became the *Teatime Magazine* in the more competitive afternoon slot. But by 1961 neither channel carried any programming specifically addressed to women, though the other 'special' group, children, was still catered for. By the mid 1960s, we should remember, broadcast television had overtaken cinema as the dominant cultural form: my material is as yet insufficient to do any more than note the concurrence of this development with the cessation of programming specifically addressed to women. But I can note the intense misogyny typical of contemporary popular cinema, as well as the emergence of the Women's Movement late in the decade. Running parallel with the consolidation of the television audience was the diminution and fragmentation of the audience for popular cinema and, it seems, a general polarization of the different interest groups constituting a British society now no longer held together, even apparently, by the Butskellite consensus of the 1950s.

There are two different routes towards an understanding of the historical television audience that I want to touch on here; neither is wholly satisfactory but used in conjunction they might lead somewhere into this almost effaced landscape of the 1950s. One entails an examination of the texts themselves, where these remain: here, drawing on the analytic practices and theoretical models of film studies, the text itself might be interrogated for its construction of the spectator, and a model of the putative audience proposed. The choice of texts would be limited to recorded material which still survives, or to material which was on film in the first place. It would also be wise to focus on texts which enjoyed some contemporary popularity, or notoriety – though in practice I expect there would be a good correlation between these two requirements, that is to say survival and popularity. The US sitcom *I Love Lucy* (1951–7), for example, appeared from the first week on commercial television, scored consistently high in both the TAM and the Nielsen ratings, and is still available. The high audience figures for this programme as well as its longevity in the schedules are evidence of its relevance and/or use-value to the contemporary audience. It featured on the cover of *Picture Post*'s special issue,⁶ and the impresario Bernard Delfont, in a 1956 *TV Times* feature article,⁷ cited it as the epitome of 'true' television. But it would not be enough to note the popularity and longevity of this programme and, through textual analyses, make direct propositions about its audiences because anything we were enabled to suggest, derived solely from examination of the text, would be tautological.

Propositions about the television audience arising from the analysis of extant texts need therefore to be considered alongside other types of 'audience' data. What traces of the actual audiences might there be? Discursive materials such as the *News Chronicle*'s

6 *Picture Post*, 24 September 1955.

7 *TV Times*, 13 April 1956, p. 4.

television review, the *TV Times* and *Radio Times* features designed to inform and to participate in constructing the audience, would come into this category. Such features, programme notes, and published viewers' letters together propose the television audience as a lively collective for whom the programme journal often attempts, in its textual address, to elide the spatial and temporal distances between the editorial team, the programmes and the 'viewers at home'. This 'discursive context' of course spreads much more widely than the two types of publication indicated here, and it would clearly be both legitimate and useful to gather a range of examples of the ways in which television programmes, audiences, viewing practices and so on were being discussed, noting whether the matter was routine or noteworthy, the subject of a polemic or of an uncontentious assertion.

To return to my landscape analogy, all this may yield insights into the climate of viewing and associated circulations of meaning. But, as historians, the more we circulate these materials amongst ourselves or circulate ourselves through these reconstructed discursive contexts, the more we are obliged to acknowledge the absent centre to our study. We can't really *know* how it was, but we can propose: and here we are obliged to recognize what interests are served by one set of propositions or another and what corroborations are available. Here is the *production* of history and, like the matter itself, we need to note not only what is 'known', 'named', 'remembered', and by whom, but also why.⁸

And this returns me to the ideology of the feminine, to the female audience, to television's strikingly overt address to women in the mid 1950s. I want to find out, as clearly as I can, *how* popular cultural forms operate as 'technologies of gender',⁹ and, even more precisely, how such forms have solicited the collusion of female subjects in what seems to me to be a shockingly disadvantaged position. What (has seemed to be) in it for us?

I began with an excessively meaningful sentence, and I want to close with an illustration that also seems to me to say more than it means. This is from the *TV Times* of 28 October 1955, and it is an advertisement for P.G. Tips tea.

A handsome floor model television set with full length doors, like those pictured in advertisements in every issue of both *TV Times* and *Radio Times* throughout the long sales drive of the 1950s, stands in the top centre of the image. The set is on, emitting light, but there is no programme because this is an interval, as the onscreen legend announces. To the left of the image, cut off by the frame, a young woman sits in an easy chair; to the right, also seen in a three quarters rear view and partly obscured by the chair, an elderly man smokes his pipe. The central chair is vacant, on its back a notice reads 'gone to make tea'. Here is television's family audience, positioned revealingly with an absent central image and an absent

⁸ The important question of *how* memory might operate is addressed by Jackie Stacey, 'Hollywood memories', *Screen*, vol. 35, no. 4 (1994), pp. 317–35 and by Susannah Radstone in this issue, pp. 34–47. These two papers, with mine, constituted the opening plenary at the 1993 Screen Studies Conference and were developed, at the draft stage, co-operatively.

⁹ Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender* (London: Macmillan, 1987).



Audience and text absent in a
P.G. Tips advertisement from
TV Times, 28 October 1955.
Picture courtesy BFI Stills.

central woman. For me, also pictured here is the research task entailed in unravelling popular culture's ideological work. Both the text and the audience are absent, but only momentarily, only accidentally: they have been there, they might be there again. It may be possible to catch a glimpse, or perhaps to imagine that one has.

reports

Turbulent Europe: conflict, identity and culture, EFTSC, London, 19–22 July 1994

At the end of July last year, London was still enjoying, and beginning to curl at the edges with, the summer's heat wave, so the relocation of the conference to the South Bank proved particularly fortuitous, with the NFT's and the National Theatre's outside cafes giving the British-organized but European-focused conference an appropriately continental feeling. The Hayward Gallery was also displaying an interesting exhibition of photographs, aptly titled 'The Epic & the Everyday', which claimed to be committed to examining 'different perspectives, different ways of looking at the world'. So apart from some minor discomfort due to the breakdown of the central air conditioning in NFT1, the organization and the venue proved to be pleasant and accommodating.

Nik Gowing's opening session was well attended, but surprisingly (intellectually at least) a rather unheated affair. The proposition that television news stories, after all, do not seem to have any significant effect on policy or on politicians surprised very few in the audience. And Gowing himself, although an authoritative and lively speaker, seemed unsure whether he should address the academics or his journalist colleagues, so that he occasionally lost his footing between the presentation of the anecdotal and the apparently more concrete evidence he had researched. The presence of a vocationally mixed audience of speakers and delegates was one of the best things about the conference, so my comment on Gowing's difficulties should not be seen as a call for the exclusion of media professionals or (for that matter) media academics, just an acknowledgement that both groups still have

much to gain from, but clearly need more experience in, speaking each other's language.

Of course, 'speaking each other's language', metaphorically or not, was an underlying concern of the conference itself. On one level, the difficulties those speakers who were using English as a second language had in being understood, both when presenting papers and in speaking from the floor, were sometimes frustrating, but it was perhaps a necessary reminder of the need for English speakers to learn patience (or another language themselves). On another level, questions of linguistic diversity, cultural difference, the construction of new social formations, and the need for new alliances, recurred consistently during the next three days.

The breadth of the conference was demonstrated by its rather unwieldy structure; its three strands, 'Public sphere', 'Markets' and 'Conflict', could not fully encapsulate the diversity of papers on offer, and some groupings worked much better than others. However, there was – surprisingly, given this diversity – a considerable amount of intellectual and occasionally emotional leakage across the strands, with the problems of the former Yugoslavia engendering the most heated debate.

Appropriately, with the kind of material evidence and often firsthand experience that this particular conflict has provided, (and which was often very much in the foreground) concepts such as the nation state, the public sphere, and theories investigating the dynamic between the global and the local provided the framework for much of the discussion. The disintegration of these concepts and the need to optimistically or pessimistically revisualize a multilingual and multiethnic future motivated many speakers in all of the strands.

Nationhood, or a coherent 'nation state' was often presented as having passed in

reality, (or to only exist in fiction) and in many of the papers the concept of a cultural identity or a form of personalized nationality evolved as a more portable and useful term in these turbulent times. The importance of the media, and of film and television images in fixing or directing the meanings of these new identities, both within and across borders, was often a focus for discussion. Even when, as Thomas Elsasser's paper suggested, particular images could be proved to be not quite what they seemed. The significant weight of different images, from the visual poetry of Wim Wenders to the documented horrors of Bosnia, were buffeted somewhat, or recontextualized by some papers in the Market strand which revealed the extent to which national borders even within Europe continue to act as stumbling blocks to a truly democratic public sphere. Even the proliferation of video tape (the notion being perhaps, as Gowing had implied, of 'video tape acting as ticker tape') and the flood of information, images and sounds this would suggest was tempered by papers detailing the increasing concentration of media ownership, as well as the activities of a few elite gatekeepers who control distribution and relay.

The concept of a democratic public sphere, or of mutually compatible public spheres, which could usefully loop these global media flows back to a public made up of media literate citizens, and thereby feed a progressive political process, concerned many of the speakers. Unfortunately, these theoretical concerns sometimes led to a less than useful level of abstraction and an implication that particular, actual instances of representation, definition and meaning were not interesting enough (in themselves) to merit discussion. When papers attempted to connect both text and context, politics and pictures, or at least referred to the way that existing or emerging programme forms might work, there was greater opportunity for intellectual interrogation and informed

debate. And it does seem time, as John Corner suggested in his conference paper ('The "macro politics" of television form'), that academic debate should move from purely abstract analyses to a more *active* engagement with 'what kinds of *representation* – modalities of image, forms of speech, and address to viewers (formal, familiar, cognitive and affective) . . . [it would] be practicable and productive to develop or "invent" for the future of popular television, both in fiction and nonfiction'.

Certainly, in papers that did concern themselves with the details of actual viewers and actual programmes – the series of papers on Gaelic and other regional or national television programming for example – it became clear that in practice, some of the ideals of a diverse public sphere with its promise of open access, greater information, and culturally 'enriching' elements, were hampered by limited budgets, problems of scheduling and the difficulties involved in ensuring or defining popularity. It remains crucial, after all, that people are still watching in the new media age. In general terms, of course, popularity is largely determined by audiences, yet unfortunately any register of their likes and dislikes, or any assessment of their construction of the meanings and pleasures to be found in various media forms, were to a large extent missing from this year's conference.

(Suggesting perhaps, that the fashion for audience studies is beginning to wane.) There were significant exceptions: Sonia Livingstone's paper for example, which concentrated on the activities of a studio audience in 'public' debates on television provided one example of how an electronic electorate could act. And while it was certainly true that the presentations of other, more limited, viewer 'ethnographies', did little more than suggest that different people can make different meanings out of the same text, and thereby served as a reminder that 'contradictory' and 'open-ended'

interpretations can rapidly lead nowhere, I feel there is still a need to engage with audiences and texts in a way that can then go on to make the connections to policy and politics, rather than apparently constructing them as mutually exclusive areas of research. This is not our practice as teachers; however, it often appears that at conferences it continues to be our practice as researchers.

The gap between ideal and real audiences and the potential and actual reception of media texts was made particularly plain in an unfortunate remark, made flippantly by the chair after John Ellis' paper ('Public service broadcasting: beyond consensus'). Ellis had provided a lively, if in my view not entirely convincing, version of a future public service television which would be alive not to tradition or the hypocrisies of some established version of nationhood, but which would, instead, give room to the various sensibilities and fragmented identities that make up the current population. He also called for the production of a kind of television that would provide a forum for the 'worrying through [of] social problems'. As a possible example of the kind of programme this service might produce he used the successful sitcom *Absolutely Fabulous*, which he claimed, 'Is a feminist sensibility expressed in a way that allows a broad range of people to enter into it without quite knowing what it is. . . . It is filled with the outrageous defiant humour of women who are profoundly unsure of their position in the world.' These were laudable sentiments; unfortunately, the chair – Nicholas Fraser – was taken off guard. Claiming to be glad to have been enlightened, he thanked Ellis and remarked that *he* had previously thought that *Absolutely Fabulous* 'was just some show about two silly, rich cows who live in Holland Park'.

Quite apart from the (hopefully unintentional) offensiveness of the remark, Fraser unwittingly demonstrated that the negotiation of diversity and difference, (or

even the effectiveness of irony from the perspective of different sensibilities) can all too easily be taken for granted. It also made me conscious that Feminism (with a big 'F' for in the foreground, rather than a small 'f' for flippant) was also a less visible presence in the conference than might have been expected. This may have been in part because it has methodologically been tied to audience studies, but its absence was notable, particularly as it was often touched on (in presentations and from the floor) as one of the key political and social movements that had helped to bring about a collapse in the apparent coherence of ideologies such as nationalism, as well as being part of the active debate concerning the makeup of contemporary political, social and sexual identities. And as I have already noted, these were all issues which dominated the conference.

However, the various irritations I am expressing here, and the concerns raised during the three days, are perhaps a relatively accurate mirror of the contradictions and changes taking place within the discipline itself, if media or cultural studies can now be understood as a discipline in Britain, or in other parts of Europe. If this is the case, then the conference can be seen to have competently done its part in creating a space for reflection, even if it was unable to fully address issues of representation, or make a satisfactory connection between both the ideological and aesthetic aspects of the media forms under discussion.

Karen Lury

40th International Short Film Festival, Oberhausen, 21–27 April 1994

In 1994 the Oberhausen Short Film Festival celebrated its fortieth anniversary – an occasion, one might have expected, for some

interpretations can rapidly lead nowhere, I feel there is still a need to engage with audiences and texts in a way that can then go on to make the connections to policy and politics, rather than apparently constructing them as mutually exclusive areas of research. This is not our practice as teachers; however, it often appears that at conferences it continues to be our practice as researchers.

The gap between ideal and real audiences and the potential and actual reception of media texts was made particularly plain in an unfortunate remark, made flippantly by the chair after John Ellis' paper ('Public service broadcasting: beyond consensus'). Ellis had provided a lively, if in my view not entirely convincing, version of a future public service television which would be alive not to tradition or the hypocrisies of some established version of nationhood, but which would, instead, give room to the various sensibilities and fragmented identities that make up the current population. He also called for the production of a kind of television that would provide a forum for the 'worrying through [of] social problems'. As a possible example of the kind of programme this service might produce he used the successful sitcom *Absolutely Fabulous*, which he claimed, 'Is a feminist sensibility expressed in a way that allows a broad range of people to enter into it without quite knowing what it is. . . . It is filled with the outrageous defiant humour of women who are profoundly unsure of their position in the world.' These were laudable sentiments; unfortunately, the chair – Nicholas Fraser – was taken off guard. Claiming to be glad to have been enlightened, he thanked Ellis and remarked that *he* had previously thought that *Absolutely Fabulous* 'was just some show about two silly, rich cows who live in Holland Park'.

Quite apart from the (hopefully unintentional) offensiveness of the remark, Fraser unwittingly demonstrated that the negotiation of diversity and difference, (or

even the effectiveness of irony from the perspective of different sensibilities) can all too easily be taken for granted. It also made me conscious that Feminism (with a big 'F' for in the foreground, rather than a small 'f' for flippant) was also a less visible presence in the conference than might have been expected. This may have been in part because it has methodologically been tied to audience studies, but its absence was notable, particularly as it was often touched on (in presentations and from the floor) as one of the key political and social movements that had helped to bring about a collapse in the apparent coherence of ideologies such as nationalism, as well as being part of the active debate concerning the makeup of contemporary political, social and sexual identities. And as I have already noted, these were all issues which dominated the conference.

However, the various irritations I am expressing here, and the concerns raised during the three days, are perhaps a relatively accurate mirror of the contradictions and changes taking place within the discipline itself, if media or cultural studies can now be understood as a discipline in Britain, or in other parts of Europe. If this is the case, then the conference can be seen to have competently done its part in creating a space for reflection, even if it was unable to fully address issues of representation, or make a satisfactory connection between both the ideological and aesthetic aspects of the media forms under discussion.

Karen Lury

40th International Short Film Festival, Oberhausen, 21–27 April 1994

In 1994 the Oberhausen Short Film Festival celebrated its fortieth anniversary – an occasion, one might have expected, for some

debate concerning both the history of the Festival, and of the short film. The opening event, however, a historic programme for once, set a very different course. The intention was to present 'classics' rather than to show exciting and controversial films and this was entirely in line with the approach of this year's Festival. There were contemplative, wideranging retrospectives, which once more contributed to the consolidation of the short film canon – but provided little reflection on the medium.

Instead, for example, on the first evening, there was Jean Mitry's train journey *Pacific 231* (France, 1949) made overdramatic by the music, and full of machine fetishization. There was just as little reason to see Norman McLaren's often revived *Neighbours* (Canada, 1952). Its antiwar message looks very naive nowadays, and the style has already been exploited in music videos. Nor did two Czech glove animation films seem absolutely essential. The only exciting thing was encountering Rybczynski's *Nowa Ksiazka/The New Book* (Poland, 1975) again, a film which still appeared fresher and aesthetically more innovative than all the contemporary short films presented. In *Nowa Ksiazka* the screen is divided into a series of squares of equal size. From very different perspectives, these show a number of locations in which, in succession, the action takes place. Parallel to that, however, elements of plot also develop which are limited to one or a few squares (or locations). The coherence of the film space is thereby destroyed, but is re-established on the time axis, while the chronological sequence of the plot is dissolved in spatiality. This reciprocal penetration of time and space draws attention to the potential of the film medium, but above all to the fact that only in film can the abstract be represented sensuously and the impossible 'realized'.

Such reflexive moments and commentaries on the medium, for which the short film is particularly well suited, were largely missing

from the programme of the International Competition. There was an absence of both political force and of aesthetic brilliance. For the most part, the programme consisted of films by filmmakers who had learned their craft well and wanted to tell a story and/or convey a message. To that end, they drew on the repertoire of a filmic means of representation which has developed for documentary and feature films – but only rarely was this resort to the 'toolbox' submitted to a critique. This is, of course, also related to the fact that in contrast to last year hardly any experimental films were shown; as the Festival director Angela Haardt explained, this is due to the production schedule of the filmmakers, who need an average of two years to complete a new film.

Themes addressed by this year's short films included family problems, disappearing cultures and social injustice, but the largest and most important group, however, were the comedies. If the pleasure in experimentation was, on the whole, missing from the Festival then these films frequently displayed a lightness of touch, sometimes even virtuosity, which made up for a great deal.

Eating Out by Pal Sletaune (Norway, 1993), for example, was extremely witty. Into a repulsively greasy and ugly snack bar (where, to a background of hideous, very loud opera music, gruesome food is prepared by a slovenly cook) storms an absurd little gangster who demands the money from the till. Although the gangster waves his gun around hysterically, the cook refuses to be rushed, and it is some time before he hands over the cash. Meanwhile, the gangster's companion takes a liking to the atmosphere of the place and has the only customer recommend a dish to her. She then goes on to complain that they never stay in one place long enough to have a good time. Her friend then quickly runs out of the cafe again and she remains to wolf down the terrible food.

Finally, because she is cold, the solitary customer offers her the sleeve of his parka to lean on. The film impresses because of the contrast between the grotesque, very low-key narrative, which one can hardly call a 'story', and the surroundings, whose awfulness is opulently and carefully staged. At points there is perhaps some lurid overemphasis, but the sensuousness of the materials from which the horrors of the snack bar are composed, and the anticlimactic ending, made the film altogether enjoyable.

My favourite film at this year's Festival was *Dropping the Baby* by Spiro Kyriacou (UK, 1993), a comedy in the Hollywood manner of the 1930s. Almost a perfect impersonation with its black and white tones, acting style, pace and set design, the film was anything but a 'remake', and its complexity was largely underestimated by public and critics. *Dropping the Baby* had much more to it than the usual 'well-made' film and offered an ironic distance to its chosen means. The theme was typical of the genre: a perfect married couple, (he is in showbiz, she is a showbiz reporter) are preoccupied by the drama of their inability to reproduce. She dreams that he drops her baby on the floor, and from then on watches him suspiciously, as she is constantly afraid that he will do something clumsy again. Food, whether cooked or burnt, is a recurring problem, as are a variety of objects that either fall, or are caught at the last moment. He blames her, because her toaster does not work; she blames him, because she cannot have a baby (although she does not really want one). The discourse about sexuality and impotence is mediated by the constant failure of activities involving objects – although it never becomes clear which of the two is responsible for this. As the narrative proceeds, the pace constantly speeds up and, when in the end, a burnt pancake causes the kitchen to explode, the woman has the last word. 'Suddenly it all became clear. It was time to sit up and read the writing on the pancake. This guy spelled

trouble with a capital T. I knew I had to do something, and fast, before it was too late.' She kicks away the trumpet he is always playing and makes it clear that now she is going to assume responsibility: in future, instead of playing with himself, he will have to play with her. Importantly, the film directed the gaze to one of the traumas which continues to be constitutive of cinema: sexual difference and the question of the distribution of power between the sexes. To do so, the filmmaker chose a historic genre which developed very differentiated, playfully dramatic ways of presenting this struggle. This time, however, the drama does not aim to restore masculinity. Instead, the whole structure collapses, culminating with an unambiguous plea for the woman to take power.

The welcome ray of light provided by the comedies was balanced, however, by a second emphasis within the competition, which centred on the theme of male rites of initiation. Again and again, the action concerned a small boy, who struggles to make his way in the world, and in so doing, turns into a replica of his father, whom he succeeds. Despite the charm which some of these films undoubtedly possessed, their conservatism was discouraging.

The regrettable fact that of sixty Competition films only ten were by women was disagreeably underlined by these unreflective depictions of male problems. The sight of a man struggling with himself, labouring under the illusion that his problems are not gender specific but universal, which had disturbed me all too often the year before, was back with a vengeance. The melancholy 'high' point of this trend was *Nikolenka* (Dimitri Yosifov, Belarus, 1993). On the endless plains of Russia, a nobleman is reunited with the love of his youth, whose life he had earlier destroyed with his thoughtlessness. Deeply moved, he believes he recognizes in her his true destiny, and lays his head in her lap to receive comfort, only

then to return to his frivolous amusements and to leave the woman still standing on the endless plains of Russia. I do not blame the filmmaker, who lives in a traditional patriarchal society; the problem lies rather with the approach of the selection committee who, on their tireless journeys to the East European film schools, are evidently unable to track down less conservative or more critical films. One argument put forward for a film like *Nikolenka* was that it represented a particular kind of East European cinema and is, at the same time, expressive of what can be described as 'the Russian soul'. In opposition to this, it might be suggested that this tendency in Russian filmmaking has had sufficient exposure over the years, and that it is perhaps time to go against the grain of such national stereotypes.

The resigned conservatism of such a film is, however, also symptomatic of the disintegration in Eastern Europe, which also obviously affects filmmaking and continues to paralyze it. This is evident, for example, in the short feature film *Ara, Megobaro/No, Pal!* (Georgi Mgeladze, Georgia, 1993). Here a somewhat conventional style is interrupted when a subjective camera angle takes the place of the principal character. The reason for this is that during the filming, the actor was killed in the war in Abkhazia, but the screenplay was not rewritten. The resulting 'horror movie' effects do not, however, make the film as a whole more convincing, nor more interesting, and can only be explained by this background information. So while defiance and despair find expression, there is also a curiously narcissistic self-consciousness.

Even more depressing was the effect of the Slovenian video *Transcentrala* (Marina Crznic and Aina Smid, 1993), a documentation of 'Neue Slowenische Kunst' (NSK), an art movement which includes groups like IRWIN and Laibach. In the video, members of the movement make statements about their work, about the NSK manifesto and about their future plans. The

credo of this movement, which was repeatedly reaffirmed by the filmmakers in the subsequent discussion, consists primarily of a postmodern appropriation of any sign system whatsoever for the purpose of making art. Art is understood as a completely independent sphere which has no effect on society, and consequently need not be tied to the familiar meanings of the signs used. So, for example, they plan a theatre event which will take place annually on 20 April. The fact that this is Hitler's birthday is supposedly of no significance. All symbols, according to the artists, even fascist ones, are freely available and can be revalued at any time; 20 April had apparently been chosen as a date because it has an internal meaning for the NSK movement. In their arguments the filmmakers repeatedly emphasize that art and reality have nothing to do with one another, and that what is involved is pure 'conceptual art, not real life'. Added to this, there is, in any case, only nationalism and war everywhere and so it would be pointless to continue taking fascist ascriptions of meaning into account. The sad thing is that this definition of a 'free realm of art' is based on the conviction that every effort is meaningless: everything can be said, but only because no one is listening anymore. This also makes self-criticism superfluous – meanings can be redefined at any time. Such an attitude, which was still possible at the beginning of the 1980s, appears dangerously inappropriate now. Reawakened nationalism and increasing rightwing radical violence demonstrate how much power is still inherent in these symbols which people thought could be treated in a playful manner.

Political scandal was certainly present at this year's Festival. The Serbian film *O Ratu i Ratnicima/About War and Warriors* (Branko Milosevic, 1993), a documentary about the war wounded, was shown in the International Competition without any special advance notice. The film starts out with the universalist stance of reporting on human

suffering and the effects of 'war', not of a particular war (which is never mentioned by name). A quite fantastically well-equipped hospital, specializing in leg injuries, is presented – with the comment, however, that medical treatment alone cannot really heal. 'The doctors take care of the wound, perhaps one day I'll even be able to walk again, but the psychological problems will remain for a long time to come', runs one of the portentous statements in this film. At the end, the wounded are asked about their plans for the future, and the last man to reply says that he will return to the war to avenge his dead relatives. The depoliticization of the war and the narrow focus on a couple of very well cared for victims of war – 'warriors not soldiers' – made this film a cynical propaganda exercise. Embarrassingly, the festival committee acted as if this were quite an ordinary Competition film; the catalogue text itself shows no awareness whatsoever of the political problems. 'In the life of a nation a war is the mirror of time, and warriors are the conscience and moral of this time and its society. War tries one's strength through its reality, tries the intellect through its necessity, and warriors are the actors and witnesses of a game where the battle between life and death solves contradictions' (p. 47). And that was not all: in the discussion after this programme block, the chair initially responded to the protests and rising indignation of the audience with evasions, and by continually delaying debate on the film. In answer to the question of why no Bosnian films were being shown, he replied in complete seriousness that these had had to be rejected, since they were too militant, and that the film shown was representative of Serbian resistance. In my opinion, such naive blindness to the message of this documentary (which was in any case completely uninteresting filmically) revealed the festival committee to be utterly incompetent and it is quite incomprehensible why a special

programme could not have made several films on the war in Bosnia available for discussion.

This fantastic misjudgement certainly overshadowed the last two days of the Festival, but for someone interested in the art of film there was nevertheless so much on offer that one could not regret having come to Oberhausen. Apart from the Competition and the Short Film Retrospective, there was an exemplary show of Japanese short films since the 1950s; with almost 150 films this represented an overwhelming and comprehensive overview. In fact, the Japanese films almost constituted a festival of their own; it was hardly possible to keep up with them as well as the general programme. Even if I missed the larger part of this retrospective, I did at least manage to catch Matsumoto Toshio's *Tsuburekatta migime no tame ni/For the Broken Right Eye* (1969), a triple-screen projection which, because of technical problems, had rarely been shown before. The film is a distinctive portrait of the Tokyo of the student movement, conducting a scathing critique of society as well as simultaneously showing subcultural, alternative movements. The juxtaposition of very heterogeneous material, multiplied by the triple projection makes excessive demands in a quite specific way, drawing the viewer into the atmosphere of the time. One feels the stress and the tension, the outrage at political conditions and the radical spirit of revolt.

There were also fine (re-)discoveries to be made in the Short Film Retrospective including, for example, three films from 1958–9 by Godard, Rivette and Truffaut in which all the stylistic features which these directors were later to elaborate could already be discerned. *Les Mistons* (1958) had an especially intense effect, giving the viewer that wonderful feeling of melancholy happiness which is only to be found in Truffaut films. A gang of boys, collectively in love with the beautiful Bernadette, spend a

whole summer trailing the unattainable object of their longing and disturbing her meetings with her boyfriend as best they can. Again and again we see her through the eyes of these adolescents: as she cycles barefoot through the village in the south of France, plays tennis with her boyfriend or makes an excursion into the countryside. The boys' irksome disruptions and their blatant spying demonstrate the complete hopelessness of their desire and the pointlessness of all their efforts. The story ends without resolution when Bernadette's friend is killed on a trip to the mountains. Both Bernadette and the boys are further away than ever from happiness; weighed down by feelings of guilt, the boys no longer even have the possibility of pestering their beloved. The film captures the contradictory nature of puberty: the drifting, the inability to act, the endless waiting, the helplessness, the cruelty and the guilt which result from this inner state of tension.

So while the return to the classics certainly had its moments of comfort, it could not hide the fact that the contemporary short film is stagnating and that innovative impulses are largely absent. East European film seems especially stuck in a deep crisis and, under the present political and economic conditions, to have lost much of its creative power.

Heike Klippel

Translated by Martin Chalmers.

Letter from Canada

On 6 June 1994, those attending the Banff International Television Conference watched as a major announcement by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission was beamed to the conference from Ottawa via satellite hookup. In a set of decisions awaited for over a year, the CRTC

announced that it would grant licences to ten new speciality television services. Virtually every major broadcasting entity and entertainment firm in Canada had submitted proposals for such services, filling their applications (forty-eight in all) with the customary promises about strengthening Canadian culture and creating opportunities for homegrown talent.

The winning applications had modelled themselves, for the most part, on low-cost services available in the USA. When these services become available to cable subscribers, at the end of this year, they will include a Country Channel, Lifestyle Television (directed at a female audience), Classic Channel (described as offering 'movies from the last 30 years') and You: Your Channel (with information and documentaries). Two French-language services were among the ten approved: a translated version of the US Arts and Entertainment channel, and a twenty-four-hour all news *Reseau de l'information*.

The most controversial decision concerned the licence for a service specializing in cultural programming. The CRTC turned down applications from consortia representing major Canadian cultural institutions, giving this licence instead to CHUM, Ltd, for a service to be called 'Bravo' (itself the name of a US channel). CHUM operates Canada's English-language music video network, MuchMusic, and was quite open in claiming that any cultural channel it offered would be similarly fast-paced and flashy. While this evoked horror in much of Canada's cultural establishment, many (including, by some accounts, the CRTC) feared that other applicants intended to do little more than stick cameras in front of ballet performances and plays. A decade earlier, C-Channel, a cultural service approved in the first round of pay-TV licences, had quickly gone bankrupt, and regulators apparently feared a similar

whole summer trailing the unattainable object of their longing and disturbing her meetings with her boyfriend as best they can. Again and again we see her through the eyes of these adolescents: as she cycles barefoot through the village in the south of France, plays tennis with her boyfriend or makes an excursion into the countryside. The boys' irksome disruptions and their blatant spying demonstrate the complete hopelessness of their desire and the pointlessness of all their efforts. The story ends without resolution when Bernadette's friend is killed on a trip to the mountains. Both Bernadette and the boys are further away than ever from happiness; weighed down by feelings of guilt, the boys no longer even have the possibility of pestering their beloved. The film captures the contradictory nature of puberty: the drifting, the inability to act, the endless waiting, the helplessness, the cruelty and the guilt which result from this inner state of tension.

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fate if it did not err this time on the side of accessibility.

In the weeks since Bravo received its licence, cultural lobbies in Canada continued to protest the decision, urging that the CRTC delay it until a broad, public discussion of cultural programming on Canadian television is initiated. While this is unlikely to happen, the uproar is adding to the perception that the new Liberal government has disappointed the arts and cultural community in Canada.

To understand this current round of decisions, three important subtexts must be noted. First, the CRTC is rushing to expand cable offerings to counter the perceived threat of so-called 'deathstar' services – direct broadcast satellite packages based in the US whose availability to Canadians has for some time now been seen as imminent. Canadian policy makers have long believed that enhancing the appeal of cable (which can more easily be owned and regulated by Canadians) is the most viable counteroffensive to the DBS threat. Secondly, to the extent that most of the new services will rely on recycled programming, they will offer the secondary and tertiary windows for Canadian audiovisual works which, it is argued, a mature entertainment industry requires. One of the new services, Showcase, will draw almost entirely on the back catalogues of the CBC and private producers for its programming.

Finally, and most importantly, the CRTC's chief commissioner has announced that the days of competitive licence hearings will soon be over. If they are required at present, he has stated quite frankly, this is only because the channel capacity of existing cable services is still limited. Once the technical limits on numbers of channels have been resolved, new services will fight it out in the

marketplace, and the very *raison d'être* of the CRTC will be in question.

On the day that these decisions were announced, the Film Studies Association of Canada began its annual conference in Calgary, Alberta. These decisions and their implications were not discussed at the conference – a reflection, perhaps, of the divide between film studies scholarship in Canada and the world of media policy and regulation. This year's conference theme was 'Film history', and its high point was the Martin Walsh Memorial Lecture by Chris Faulkner of Carleton University. Faulkner's presentation moved eloquently between the concerns of his ongoing research (French cinema in the 1930s) and the broader problem of locating national cultural formations within historical time. Other papers at the conference reflected the variety of interests typical of the discipline at this time, but the most refreshing were those which marked new directions in the excavation of hitherto obscure moments in Canadian film history.

My last report suggested there were no postgraduate programmes in Film Studies in Canada, with the exception of an MFA degree at York University. For overlooking existing programmes at the University of British Columbia and University of Alberta I have been roundly and rightly slapped on the wrist. Ignorance of what goes on elsewhere is one of the perennial sins of the central Canadian, and for my own I stand humbly corrected. Also since that last report, the Université de Montréal has received approval for a Master's programme, to be offered within its Département d'Histoire de l'Art.

Will Straw

reviews

review article:

Masculinity and its discontents

Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*. New York and London: Routledge, 1992, 447pp.

JOHN FLETCHER

Contemporary academic debates about sexuality are often polarized between Foucauldian discourse theory and psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity and the unconscious. The psychoanalytic and Foucauldian perspectives might each be said to occupy the blindspot of the other. Psychoanalytic theory is characteristically impervious to the historicity of the categories (for example, hetero/homosexuality, perversion) that it relies on, ignoring their function of ideological regulation and the complex genealogies sedimented within them. Equally, Foucault's mapping of the sexuality/power relation in the *History of Sexuality* renders invisible and unthought the complex subjective histories of identity and desire; for by reading identity and desire off from the classificatory and botanizing strategies of 'power', the whole level of the psychical (the subjective deployment of mental representations and their investments) is occluded.

Kaja Silverman's book begins and ends explicitly with Foucault's challenge to the politics of naturalism that underwrote the sexual liberationist thinking of the 1960s and later: 'We must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power; on the contrary, one tracks along the course laid out by the general deployment of sexuality'.¹ Silverman's central thesis is that certain psychic formations do in fact say 'no' to power, for the margins of her title are psychic ones and she is concerned to restore to psychic life its own specific gravity and resistance to the Oedipal norms that

¹ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality* (London: Vintage, 1980), p. 157.

regulate the sexual field. In particular, she outlines certain forms of male subjectivity that in decentring the phallus and refusing a phallic identity, 'refuse to write "lack" at the site of the female body' (p. 388), 'absent themselves from the line of paternal succession' (p. 389) and embrace the 'castrations' constitutive of all subjectivity but which are usually disavowed and projected by the male onto a stigmatized femininity. A certain psychic 'femininity' – 'alternative ways of inhabiting a morphologically masculine body' – is thus lived 'no longer as disenfranchisement and subordination, but rather as phallic divestiture, as a way of saying "no" to power' (p. 389). The cultural formations within which she locates these marginal male subjectivities include the cinema of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, the novels of Henry James and Marcel Proust. The life-in-the-work of T. E. Lawrence, as well as a group of postwar Hollywood films of returning veterans and small town family life (*The Best Years of Our Lives* [William Wyler, 1946]; *It's a Wonderful Life* [Frank Capra, 1946]; *The Guilt of Janet Ames* [Henry Levin, 1947]) are also analysed for the masochism and castration anxiety they exhibit as constitutive of normative masculinity under the impact of personal and historical trauma. As is clear from the above description of the book's project, its theoretical resources are predominantly psychoanalytic, drawing on the work of Freud, Lacan and Laplanche.

These resources are deployed to construct what Silverman calls a psychoanalytic theory of hegemony and her starting point is the interface between Althusser and Lacan which had been so crucial for the anglophone circulation of radical theory in the 1970s and for British Film Studies in particular – a process in which *Screen* played an important vanguard role. Silverman addresses these issues in her opening chapter on 'The dominant fiction', which is her speculatively most ambitious, if inevitably most problematic, chapter. It is refreshing and even exhilarating to have so energetic a return to the now largely abandoned debates about kinship structure, mode of production and psychic formation, and so ambitious an attempt to synthesise elements from anthropology, historical materialism and psychoanalysis. This represents a heartening recovery of scope after the postmodern rejection of grand narratives and structural theory.

The problem is the combination of so many different theoretical traditions in the space of a single, albeit lengthy, chapter, the negotiation of what often seem incommensurable paradigms, and the somewhat arbitrary choice of theoretical starting points (for example, the choice of Levi-Strauss's text of 1947, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, would seem to be determined more by its place in the history of French structuralism than by its importance for contemporary anthropological theories of kinship). Marxism is represented by Althusserian theory at its most functionalist, that is, the theory of ideology as the constitution of concrete individuals as

subjects, with its overextension of the category of ideology to include the formation of subjectivity in conformity with the purposes of the family and state apparatuses. This necessarily ignores not only the autocritiques of the imploding Althusserian current as it exited from Marxism into discourse theory, but the richness of much non-Althusserian Marxist thought about ideology. With such a focus, the Marxist critique of political economy disappears without trace while the concept of the mode of production features as an unexamined horizon or anchor term. Silverman herself virtually acknowledges the unpromising nature of her starting point when, after much cajoling of various resistant passages of Althusser in the direction she wants them to go, she declares: 'I will henceforth abandon any pretense that this conceptual conglomeration can be even loosely equated with the ideology of the ruling class. Instead, I will propose that we think of the primary agency of social consensus as a "dominant fiction", and that we understand its core elements to be deployable for class purposes, but not themselves the automatic vehicles for particular class interests' (p. 28). The rest of the chapter lays out an intimidating battery of categories from psychoanalysis and anthropology that threaten a theoretical surplus or redundancy of terms beyond the reader's grasp of their pertinence and usefulness. Silverman insists continually on the need to keep concepts in their proper place and the levels of theoretical abstraction distinct: 'It is consequently necessary to hold at some theoretical distance from each other not only the Name-of-the-Father and the symbolic order, the symbolic order and the dominant fiction, the dominant fiction and the Oedipus complex, but the Oedipus complex and the psyche' (p. 40). With the Law of Language (Lacan), the Law of Kinship (Levi-Strauss), ideology (both class and familial) and mode of production all in play, with Lacan's *moi*, the gaze and the screen, along with Laplanche's fantasmatic all still to come, the will to hold theoretical distinctions and distances assumes heroic proportions.

It is beyond the scope of this review to do justice to the conceptual resourcefulness and skill of Silverman's exposition, but it is possible to read the proliferation of terms and the strenuous attempt to arrest their slippage or merger as the symptoms of a larger tension that informs the book. This is a tension between a structural determinist framework of analysis and the desire to find a space of subjective agency, efficacious deviancy, perverse oppositionality – the ability to say 'no' to power, in the interests of a feminist sexual or libidinal politics. The bristling array of terms I have cited above mostly specifies external agencies and apparatuses that are said to lay down the bases of subjectivity. Silverman unfolds a bleakly rigorous vision, starting from the Lacanian ontology of lack with its 'acephalic' or headless subject of the unconscious, an identityless, egoless yearning void or *je*, that misrecognizes itself in

the ego or *moi*, a mirage-like object photo-graphed or written by the gaze – itself an irreducibly external agency not to be confused with the look of any individual but coterminous with the pre-existent field of the visible. Submitted to symbolic castration and mortification as the price of its entry into language, fetishistically fixated in a phallic identity that disavows its constitutive castration in the case of the male subject, its desire encrypted in a set of repetitive fantasmatic scenes, the Lacanian subject would seem unpromising material, to say the least, for any oppositional agency that might constitute a politics, libidinal or otherwise.

Yet for all her insistence on lack, specularity and alterity as the defining conditions of subjectivity, Silverman scrupulously refuses to reduce subjectivity to the cultural and symbolic norms that speak it. The psyche, she argues, does not directly inhabit either the symbolic order of kinship or the mode of production (the book's two structural horizons) but lives its imaginary relation to them via an ideological facilitation that operates through fantasy and imaginary captation. The positive Oedipus complex is proposed as the primary vehicle of insertion for the male subject into these relations. The book is concerned, however, with both the contradictions internal to the normative paternal identification that results from the positive male Oedipus and that constitute it as an irresolvable double bind, as well as with the refusals and reversals of identification and desire – specifically masochism and homosexuality – that open up alternative psychic trajectories through the normalizing processes of acculturation. It is in these imaginary relations that a margin for resistance, negotiation and perversion, is sought from the grim logic of structural determination and ontological deficiency. Yet rather than the leaky or open nature of the structures, the impossibility of their aspirations to closure or consistency, it is the very centrality and organizing power of a phallogentric sexual difference that Silverman insists on: 'I hope to dramatize the central part which the equation of penis and phallus plays in the maintenance of a certain "reality" – to demonstrate that the continuation of our "world" depends upon a collective belief in that equation' (p. 65); 'To effect a large-scale re-configuration of male identity and desire would render null and void virtually everything else that commands general belief' (p. 3). If sexual difference 'holds' the dominant fiction and its narratives, secures them for the reproduction of the englobing structures, it is to that very sexual difference and its discontents that Silverman nevertheless looks for the undoing of the dominant fiction and its ideological work. This would seem to go against the grain of her main theoretical resources – Lacanian theory. One cannot help but feel a certain scepticism, not only about the sweeping nature of the claims being made, whether they are the ontology of lack, the so called Law of Language or the centrality of the phallus and phallogentrism, but more crucially about the capacity of the

Lacanian register alone to sustain her project of a radical libidinal politics.

For all the exhilaration of its panoptic sweep, the book's opening chapter and overview lie across the reader's path somewhat like a metatheoretical sphinx or dragon. It would be a pity if this were to deter any prospective reader from venturing further, as Silverman produces a series of vigilant and resourceful readings of psychoanalytic texts that bring a radicalized understanding of the Lacanian gaze or the Freudian elaborations and slippages around masochism and its infantile beating fantasies, or the classic schemas of homosexual inversion, to bear on a range of films and literary texts with fascinating results.

Her reading of the two veteran films – Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* and Levin's *The Guilt of Janet Ames* – through their presentation of male failure and emasculation, focuses on the destructive effects of war trauma on postwar US culture's belief in the masculine ideals of sufficiency and mastery. In Wyler's film she pinpoints the motif of amputation (the character Homer Parish played by Harold Russell, a genuine amputee) and its symbolic force and extension in the extraordinary bomber's graveyard sequence, where the metaphorical rhyming across the film of the propellorless planes with the image of Homer's stump, gathers up the various male experiences of loss, disfigurement, betrayal and displacement into an anguished crescendo of castration and lost potency. Whereas Wyler's film foregrounds and eroticizes the spectacle of male lack as the foundation of its heterosexual pairings, Silverman argues, Levin's film demonstrates the mechanisms of projection and disavowal whereby the woman is both blamed for male failure and insufficiency and at the same time called upon to deny that failure. The eponymous heroine, Janet Ames (Rosalind Russell), is 'cured' of her mysterious inability to walk by denying the evidence of male failure and reinventing her (and the female spectator's) belief in the openly fabricated images of an idealized masculinity. Her third film, Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*, displaces the trauma of the war onto the home front in its dealings with the emasculating effects of small-town life. George Bailey (James Stewart), who wishes to escape Bedford Falls, leave the family business and Mary, the very determined girl-next-door (Donna Reed), is recruited by an angelic intervention to a life of civilian self-sacrifice, where he embraces and comes to take pleasure in the very things that had frustrated and thwarted him. Silverman's persuasive reading of all three films testifies to the ideological exhaustion of the dominant fiction in the postwar USA and of its capacity to organize belief in the ideals of masculine sufficiency. The films emerge as a series of graphic representations of the castrations and discontents that must be misrecognized and sublimated for the ideals of the masculine norm to be recredited.

The most striking example of the unmaking or reversal of a normative (even heroic) masculinity is Silverman's presentation of T. E. Lawrence. She reads *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* with its narrative of Lawrence's part in the Arab national struggle, along with his later work *The Mint* about his life as a rank and file airman in the RAF. Drawing on Freud's distinctions between types of masochism she demonstrates the way Lawrence's masochistic homosexuality undergoes a sublimation into a form of heroic leadership and an identification with the Arab cause 'which underwrite rather than challenge his virility' (p. 300). In particular, she argues, under the impact of the notorious Deraa episode in which Lawrence was captured, beaten and possibly raped by the Turkish enemy, there is a shift in Lawrence's psychic economy from a reflexive to a 'feminine' masochism. This she describes as a shift from a self-punishing and sublimated homoeroticism, identifying with the Arab cause embodied in an idealized Arab virility, in whose name trials and punishments could be both inflicted and endured, to a refusal of all self-aggrandizing identities and leadership positions, and an identification with the anonymous collectivity of servicemen, 'ridden beasts' in the service of a higher authority. While both are animated by a shared fantasy of eroticized submission and punishment, the former kind of masochism allows a reflexive self-sufficiency through a simultaneous identification with beater and beaten, leader and led, while the latter, under the impact of trauma, excludes any position but that of submission, service, punishment and self-abasement as the site of identification and pleasure. Lawrence thereby enacts 'a dramatic repudiation of power' (p. 334) which, Silverman argues, demonstrates the reversal of the ideal of virile mastery.

One of the ways in which Silverman dismantles the normative ideal of masculine mastery is through a lengthy exposition of the Lacanian theory of the gaze which rigorously distinguishes between the gaze and the look, placing the latter on the side of lack and desire, stressing the prior specularity of all viewing positions and calling into question the standard antitheses of spectator and spectacle (especially any too-easy gendering of the look as male and the spectacle as female). This is elaborated through analyses of Fassbinder's films *Gods of the Plague* (1969) and *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1973) and a fascinating if controversial chapter on the positioning of the spectator in Henry James's fiction. Her analysis of James brings out the traumatized receptivity of the observer that sustains both Jamesian authorial subjectivity and the organization of narrative relations between characters in the novels. The Jamesian observer is paralysed by a knowledge that comes from surprising a scene of intimacy between two others, or from vicariously participating in that scene, in Jamesian parlance, 'going behind' the figures involved. This Silverman terms a 'sodomitical identification'

with the figures in the fantasy of a primal scene of sexual action and origins. It is a masochistic economy, characterized by renunciation and indirection, in which knowledge is uncoupled from power and a normative masculine or phallic identity is deferred or delegated elsewhere. This position Silverman locates as an intersection between positive and negative Oedipus complexes, 'foreclosed from the scene of passion except through identifications which challenge the binarisms of sexual difference' and whose 'recourse to vision is more generative of trauma than of power' (p. 180). Silverman's reading productively challenges the now standard Foucauldian equation of knowledge and power and the common feminist equation of both with the male look.

In Silverman's account of deviant masculinities, both in her chapter on James and her extraordinary final chapter on male homosexuality and Proust, she stresses the formative role of cross-gender identification or alliance with the mother. The framework of the negative Oedipus in her analysis of James, however, tends to translate this recognition into an attribution of causal primacy to a scene of heterosexual coupling (homosexuality is a permutation of heterosexuality). As Eve Sedgwick has recently argued, within this framework homosexuality can only ever feature as an erotic outcome of some permutation of a founding heterosexual primal scene, never as itself a formative model or point of departure. Sedgwick's alternative thesis of a queer tutelage argues that 'the foundational presence of "a man" in a woman's coming-to-identity, or of a "woman" in a man's, need have no predetermined relation to heterosexual teleologies – given the likelihood that the internalised "man" or "woman" may themselves function as embodiments of same sex desires or queer identities.'² Sedgwick's argument has considerable force, especially given the rather ruthlessly formulaic way in which Silverman processes James's narratives into Oedipal primal triangles in which 'going behind' is translated into a rear entry identification with an act of heterosexual penetration. What Sedgwick calls the anal poetics of the Jamesian text tends to be read by Silverman as a fantasmic substitute for the phallus and its vaginal complement. For all the deviant identifications Silverman describes and celebrates, they remain permutations of the procreative couple and its terms of phallic difference.

The book concludes by considering forms of male subjectivity that would seem to be outside the field of masculinity altogether. The final chapter begins by posing the question, 'What is the place of femininity in male homosexuality?' Its consideration of the various answers given to the question take us from Karl Ulrichs's first sexological formulation of the trope of inversion – 'a female soul enclosed in a male body' – to Foucault. Her concern, however, is with the psychoanalytic schemas of inversion formulated by Freud to

2 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Is the rectum straight? Identification and identity in *The Wings of the Dove*', in *Tendencies*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 75. Sedgwick argues that James's Kate Croy has installed at the core of her sexual and gender formation the drama of her father Lionel Croy, the abject figure of an 'unspeakable' homosexual disgrace. Her identity is thus formed around 'an irreducible compound of a homophobic prohibition with a nascent homosexual identity, both in a gender not her own' (p. 77).

map the psychic formation of male homosexuality. She distinguishes three models which she maps in triangular form, but what she calls the Leonardo model, elaborated most fully by Freud in his analysis of Leonardo Da Vinci, is the real object of interest.

The Leonardo paradigm, Silverman argues, forecloses entirely the figure of the father as object of either identification or desire. It entails the conversion of an intense early attachment to the mother into an identification that incorporates and internalizes her and her attributes as an organizing figure through whom the male subject loves and desires. The youthful figures he loves represent himself as the object of his mother's love. Generalizing from Freud's analysis of Leonardo, Silverman describes a reversible erotic scenario characterized by an oscillation between an active identification with a mother rendered phallic through the son's gift of his penis and a receptive pleasure concentrated at the mouth, the site of maternal care. The maternal position here is characterized not by passivity but by activity and penetration, Silverman argues: 'Indeed, I will go further: it is only from the maternal position that one wields the penis' (p. 372).

Curiously, Silverman concludes her discussion of male homosexuality with a reading of Proust's *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* as a text that routes desire through a feminine identification towards a female object to the virtual exclusion not only of the penis but of the male body as an erotic object. The enigma created by Proust's notorious homosexuality and the centrality of the woman as desired object in his text is well known. Silverman addresses this by locating it within her account of the Leonardo paradigm, marked by 'a tendency for the libidinal investment of the mother to give way to identification with her, and a certain exorbitance with respect to pleasures of the mouth, with a corresponding short-circuiting of genitality' (p. 375). If the mother is the site of Marcel's identification, then his mistress, Albertine, is the loved representative of the narrator's youth. It is difficult, however, to sustain the analogy of Marcel with Freud's Leonardo, as Silverman realizes, in the absence of any desire for or indeed psychic investment in a male figure or body. The erotic anomalies of the Marcel/Albertine relation are such that it leads Silverman to the wonderful understatement: 'it is consequently difficult to conceptualise their relationship as involving two "men", however de-essentialised the definition of masculinity' (p. 383). She concludes that Proust's is a text in which male homosexuality finds expression in a fantasy of lesbianism and that Albertine's lesbianism is not so much an obstacle as the precondition for Marcel's desire for her, which finds its point of entry into the scene of lesbian eroticism through identification with its intensely imagined oral pleasures.

Persuasive as Silverman's close reading is of the Châtellerault passage she privileges, as are her arguments that the text's

representation of the female body is untouched by the thematics of castration, I am left unpersuaded by her attempt to designate the erotic economy she outlines as homosexual, let alone as 'a transcendent and utopian moment in the history of gay representation' (p. 387). That Marcel is psychically female (feminine?) but corporeally male, 'a woman's soul enclosed in a man's body', indicates not his homosexuality but the inadequacy of Ulrichs's famous formulation as a general formula for male homosexuality, and its inability to specify its various forms and pleasures. The difficulty here is similar to that posed by the orthodox psychoanalytic tradition, which Silverman continues, of discussing Schreber's *Memoirs* in terms of his supposed homosexuality, when in fact they enact the fantasy of an erasure of the male body as the precondition for a transsexual fantasy of identification with and desire for the female body. Silverman herself acknowledges 'Marcel's insistent psychic factoring out of his own genitals' (p. 386), as well as his wish to 'neutralize' the 'threat' posed by his own body to the fantasy of a 'same sex' relationship with Albertine. With both Schreber and Marcel, what we have in psychotic and non-psychotic modes is the disruptive and transformative (in Schreber's case radically disabling) force of a transsexual fantasy in the context of a fragile and imperilled heterosexuality. Both of them may constitute in Silverman's terms deviant or marginal masculinities, and both may be organized around the centrality of a maternal identification, but neither of them could be construed as representations of male homosexual desire – a desire for another male body – that can only appear profoundly alien to them.

For all the resourcefulness and intellectual excitement of Silverman's reading of Proust and its move beyond the terms of heterosexual difference that enclose her reading of James, her starting points return to limit her arguments. This is not only the pertinent question of the place of a psychic femininity within male homosexuality which seems to end by reading out the specificity of male homosexual desire. There is also her general metatheoretical perspective within which femininity 'designates a number of conditions that are constitutive of all subjectivity' (p. 389), leaving to conventional masculinity only the violent denial and disavowal of them as its constitutive feature. The intolerable 'truth' of subjectivity that the feminine represents can only fall scapegoat to 'the murderous logic of traditional male subjectivity' (p. 389). Within this framework, male genitality seems to be an impossible object, whether in its heterosexual or homosexual forms (Silverman's passing reference to the inclusion of the penis in the 'Leonardo' paradigm remains an unexplored speculative construction), and male heterosexuality to be indistinguishable from sadism. Disconcertingly, given the book's theoretical commitments and sophistication, this

would seem to bear an uncanny resemblance to both the classic infantile misprisions of the Freudian primal scene and the dystopian, radical feminist visions of Andrea Dworkin, Catherine MacKinnon or Sheila Jeffreys.

This is clear in the long gruelling chapter on Fassbinder's two films *In a Year of Thirteen Moons* (1978) and *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980) which celebrates the 'ruination of masculinity' in Fassbinder's cinema through its scenes of mutilation, crucifixion and dismemberment of the male body. Silverman sees this as a return to sender of the violence inflicted by the male body on others (in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* the rape and murder of the sisters Minna and Ida). However, the endorsement of 'masochistic bliss' as the only way for the male subject 'to break out of the vicious circle of masculinity . . . through castration and self-cancellation' (p. 278) ends by proposing a form of subjectivity that is self-hating and self-punishing. If this is saying 'no' to power, one might wonder in whose name Fassbinder's dramas of male-to-male violence and self-violence are being licensed. Faced with the director's insertion of himself into the slaughterhouse sequence of the film's *Epilogue* in a state of sadomasochistic rapport with his protagonist's suffering and dismemberment, Silverman's principle of heteropathic identification with the victim seems incapable of indicating what idol is being propitiated by such hecatombs.

As against these extremes of negativity, Proust's image of 'the curved thigh approaching the throbbing mouth' may well offer 'gains' for the female subject both at the level of sexual practice and the fantasies that animate it. However, the erotic economy 'that delineates a continuity of pleasure extending from male lips to female genitals' (p. 388), for all its defiance of 'the procreative imperative', does not address gay male sexuality at all, and may well seem somewhat restricted, if honorably non-phallic, to the heterosexual man who wishes to include his genitals within his sexual practice. For a heterosexual male, or indeed female, reader who is being invited to envisage a reconfiguration of masculine identity and desire, the alternatives of self-immolation or cunnilingus may seem somewhat less than winning.

The theoretical stamina and rigour of Silverman's book and its attentive and detailed readings of cinematic, literary and theoretical texts are by turns exhilarating and exhausting. It constitutes a crucial feminist intervention within the fields of 'men's studies' and a psychoanalytically-motivated cultural studies. Most of all it renews and refreshes one's attention to the necessary incommensurability of the psychic and the social at a time when the pressures to reduce or abandon one in the interests of the other have never been so great.

review:

Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. London: British Film Institute, 1992, 260pp.

Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1993, 180pp.

LIZZIE FRANCKE

Four years ago the National Film Theatre screened the director Amy Jones's and writer Rita Mae Brown's *Slumber Party Massacre* (1982) as part of a season devoted to films made by women, with particular attention to genres usually associated with male directors/writers. A couple of weeks later, the programmers (myself included) received letters from women who had been in the audience but had walked out during the screening, complaining about the inclusion of this slasher movie. The women's responses seemed fairly typical of the complaints directed at this particular genre: that is, that the depiction of teenage girls being snuffed out by a power-drill-waving maniac was misogynist, and it had no place in a women's film season regardless of who had made it and regardless of the fact that it, in common with other films in the genre, had a plucky heroine who eventually turned out to be rather savvy with power tools herself (though one wonders if they stayed long enough to find this out). For the demurring members of the audience, *Slumber Party Massacre* was party to the same male sadism and female victimization that marked all its predecessors. As with pornography, this is where the argument about feminism and horror has always seemed wearily to end up. Feminist women, it seemed, had no place messing about with the genre. No doubt the women in the NFT felt like trespassers at some nasty ritual for adolescent males (the audience traditionally associated with the slasher film).

However, in her brilliant and persuasive analysis, *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, Carol Clover reveals how feminism has everything at stake in the modern horror film. The advent of the 'Final Girl' phenomenon – the exhausted but triumphant Jamie Lee Curtis in *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978) being the first – might seem enough of a clue as to the way in which the genre skewers issues of gender. But crucial to Clover is the concern that 'real-life women and feminist politics' have not been entirely well served by the 'astonishingly insistent claim that horror's satisfactions begin and end in sadism'. Clover goes straight to the 'bleeding heart' of the matter, and questions the kind of pleasures that that adolescent male audience might be drawing from the films, and in so doing upsets assumptions about not just the horror genre's, but also film theory's, huge investment in the sadistic male spectator. For it is this male sadism that nails gender power relations. It is a 'status-quo-supportive cliché of modern cultural criticism' that urgently needs to be carved up.

The historical parameters of her discussion are wonderfully candid; refreshingly, we are told that the book found its origins when a friend 'dared' her to go and see *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* in 1985. She confesses that it jolted her next day into a voyage around her local video store where she picked out films for further perusal on the basis of their box covers, with their images of 'screaming women, poised knives, terrified eyeballs'. But for Clover, whose investigation covers the exploitation movies of the late 1970s through to the 1980s (with subsections of slasher, occult and rape-revenge) those terrified eyeballs did not belong to the legions of screaming actresses, but rather to the boys in the audience who watched them, cowering in their own fear and pain. For while their eyes might be poised in an assaultive gaze, equally, as the ocular imagery that pops up throughout the history of horror suggests, those eyes are also vulnerable soft globes which can themselves be assaulted by pins, knives, arrows and, not least, by light. We need only to think of the pierced iris in the opening credits of *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960) to which Clover refers in order to support her case for the 'victim-identified look'.

Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Tobe Hooper, 1974), *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) and the bogey of them all *I Spit On Your Grave* (Meir Zarchi, 1977) are amongst the telltale titles in the slew of more recent films she discusses. In her discussion, Clover reveals a far more complex and ambivalent set of identification processes. The 'kinky creativity' of these mostly low-budget horror films, produced in an era in which ideas about masculinity were liquidated by the women's movement, the gay rights movement and the Vietnam war, allows for a promiscuity of simultaneous male audience identifications with the monster, its prey and the vanquishing 'Final Girl'. Never was there a more restless donning of

transsexual clothing. As she declares: 'What filmmakers seem to know better than film critics is that gender is less a wall than a permeable membrane'.

The concept of a permeable membrane is a key metaphor, not just for cross-gender identification but also for the way in which ideas ooze between films. Clover notes how the marginalized, awkward and brazen creativity of the 1970s and 1980s video-store staples finds its way into the mainstream films of the late 1980s, albeit in a tamer guise. The rape-revenge fantasy of *I Spit On Your Grave* erupts in a more repressed form into the Oscar winning respectability of *The Accused* (Jonathan Kaplan, 1988). But, as Clover argues, *I Spit On Your Grave* in turn owes much to John Borman's *Deliverance* (1972); indeed it is the pivotal debt upon which her reading of the rape-revenge film turns.

The concept of the cannibilization of ideas in horror films is an apt one, and it is revealing to discover just what filmmakers appropriate for their movies. Clover records the fact that several directors of slasher films, including Catherine Cyran who was responsible for *Slumber Party Massacre III* (1990), made adjustments to their work after reading the first chapter of her book, *Her Body, Himself*, when it was published as a separate essay in 1987. Such dangerous liaisons between theory and practice have always seemed more possible in the exploitation sector, but as Clover rightfully mourns the passing of the 'kinky' phase, and the 'well-spring of the low tradition' dries up due to the economic climate, it seems sadly as though we might have to wait some time to discover what the savvier directors can hack out of *Men, Women and Chainsaws*. Meanwhile the book serves as an astute and elegant dissection of a marginalized, even despised, genre, and one that opens up all sorts of questions about the mainstream body of theory.

In *The Monstrous-Feminine* Barbara Creed also delves into the darkness of horror cinema in order to elucidate some blind spots in cultural/psychoanalytical-based theory. She, too, questions the presumption that seems so fixed by the critical approach to the genre: that the films cast women as passive victims and men as their sadistic and monstrous tormentors. For, as she suggests, such an equation overlooks the looming presence of the female monster in the history of horror films – the possessed or telekinetic daughters of *The Exorcist* and *Carrie* (Brian de Palma, 1976), the vampire lovers in such films as *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983) and *Twins of Evil* (John Hough, 1971), or the mother with her oozing embryonic sacs in *The Brood* (David Cronenberg, 1979). But this is not just some equal opportunities role reversal. Creed introduces the term 'monstrous-feminine' to describe the legion of creatures that she wishes to scrutinize. 'The phrase . . . emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity.'

Creed draws upon Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject and the

maternal to identify the troublesome archetypes of archaic mother, the monstrous womb, the witch, the vampire and the possessed woman. That is, those figures who break from their neat and proper, traditional feminine role and instead burst out with femaleness in all its glorious grotesqueness. In the case of the grunting, filth-spewing teenager Reagan in *The Exorcist*, this process is all the more wily because, as Creed wryly notes, she makes such a spectacle of herself before 'the shocked eyes of two male clerics'. Never was the symbolic order more threatened, the abject more visible. If this supports the case for a non-passive construction of femininity, Creed furthers this by also examining the phenomenon of the castrating mother or *femme castrice* (such as the knife-wielding 'Final Girl'). In her reassessment of Freud's case study of 'Little Hans', she demonstrates just how repressed the concept has been, and consequently how it has been overlooked in feminist film theory. This has profound consequences for ideas of sexual difference, with Creed coming from a different direction to share and support Clover's questioning of the sadistic male spectorial position.

While in the past, feminist writers have celebrated the possibilities of the mythologies of, for instance, the crone, Creed is keen to distinguish her study and explain that these complex stereotypes – that are a construct of patriarchal ideology – speak more about 'male fears than female desire or subjectivity'. But one draws from her book a profound sense of just how furtive and useful the notion of the monstrous-feminine might be. If the pus-oozing, puking, bleeding and mewling women draw attention to the 'frailty of the symbolic order', then one might truly relish such revolting – and all-engulfing – femininity. As Clover and Creed reveal, in the kinky and mucky arena of horror cinema there is much for those interested in gender to delve into rather than walk out on.

review:

Sonia Livingstone and Peter Lunt, *Talk on Television: Audience Participation and Public Debate*. London: Routledge, 1994, 201pp.

KAY RICHARDSON

This is a book about 'audience discussion programmes' on television, using both textual analysis and various forms of television audience research (screenings with group discussions, interviews, questionnaires). The authors' principal focus of interest is upon programmes where a host who is a media professional facilitates discussion between members of an invited studio audience on selected topics of social concern. The paradigm example in this book is the British daytime programme *Kilroy*, hosted by the former Labour party MP Robert Kilroy-Silk. Other series touched upon include the British *Question Time*, and *The Time, The Place*, as well as the US *Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Donahue*.

This list may already indicate some of the difficulties involved in distinguishing a discrete category, with shared properties, of audience discussion programmes. For example, British viewers will know that *Question Time* has three types of participant: a host, studio guests (public figures, especially politicians) and a studio audience. Interaction between the guests is as important as that between the audience and the guests (and more important than interaction between members of the audience) and the event is understood principally as a 'debate' – the host is, specifically, a *chairman*. *Kilroy* has only the first and the last of these types of participant, and is less easily assimilated in the genre of debate. Livingstone and Lunt argue that there is an inherent generic instability in all such programmes, variously mixing 'debate', 'romance' and 'therapy' forms of talk. This argument raises some

interesting questions about how communicative roles are understood and managed on television which I shall return to below.

The principal aims of this project (though the research agenda as reflected in the six substantive chapters is actually a very diffuse one) fit within a research context concerned with the changing conditions for participation in public debate on the part of 'ordinary people'. Audience discussion programmes are interesting in this context because they are relatively new, and because they can be used as a touchstone in the continuing standoff between cultural pessimists and optimists (here an issue of understanding/critique/ political participation rather than of taste/pleasure). Cultural pessimists, say the authors, will mistrust the appearance of democratic participation, and see in audience discussion programmes the substitution of elite-managed pseudodebate for the genuine article. Cultural optimists may see, and welcome, the weakening of traditional conventions for the management of debate under pressure from more experientially-grounded talk; whilst more sceptical critics will be anxious about the (lack of) rhetorical power of discourse grounded *only* in personal experience. Livingstone and Lunt incline more towards the optimistic end of the spectrum, though they reserve their own positive evaluation for the final chapter. Yet it would misrepresent the book to describe it as a full-blooded attempt to argue the optimistic case – the counterpressures are very evident throughout.

The third chapter of the book is of particular interest as an attempt to capture the essential communicative character of audience discussion programmes, drawing upon Goffman's notion of *participation framework*. The value of this discussion is in the way it draws attention to the complexity of these interactional relations, and indicates the need for an analysis of how different levels and dimensions of communicative organization arise and are articulated with each other: how is it, for example, that the participants in such programmes can be understood via the category of 'audience', as well as via that of 'public'? In the spirit of Goffman, it is interesting to reflect on the term 'audience discussion programme'. The concept of audience in its core significance denotes a participant (collective) of a particular sort in a speech event. The interactional role of the audience is principally that of giving or withholding appreciation of a performance – verbal, musical or other – staged for its benefit. Television embeds the performer–audience relation within a larger structure of the same kind, so that the studio audience, included within the camera's framing, is for the television audience part of the overall performance.

The term 'audience participation' reminds us that it is common practice, with this role structure in place, to involve 'appreciating' participants in the performance, though the terms of this participation remain very much under the control of the official

performing participants. One institutionalized form of boundary-crossing involves audience members volunteering to leave, or being coerced into leaving, the security of the auditorium space (or its television studio equivalent) and joining the performers on stage. Many game shows (prototypically *The Price is Right*) celebrate this moment and base their own structure upon it.

On the face of things, *Kilroy* takes us to the logical limit of the idea of studio audience members as performers. Its front-of-camera space enforces no separation of performer and audience, and thus the visual rhetoric of shot (performers) and counter shot (audience) with contrasting gaze direction is made impossible. The possibility of this transformation, of course, depends upon the stability of what it is transforming. If *Kilroy* is an audience discussion programme then, appearances notwithstanding, the participants in the studio are still in some sense an audience. This is precisely their value, and the programme's. Furthermore, these participants are to be understood as coming from a place within the 'outer' rather than the 'inner' interactional structure – the television audience rather than the studio audience. When these participants, already understood as a surrogate for the television audience, are glossed as representatives of 'the (general) public', a further complexity is introduced, overlaying the *communicative* roles with more specifically *political* ones. 'Public' is a notoriously slippery term, (it can also be employed with an *economic* sense, overlapping with the category of 'consumer') but the best sense for it here is the sense in which it overlaps with that of 'citizen' – persons possessing acknowledged rights as ordinary members of the political community, to whom the political leaders are in principle accountable.

Livingstone and Lunt also employ such concepts as 'host' and 'guest', though without explicitly acknowledging that these take us beyond Goffman's apparatus, and require us to consider the *institutional* grounding of broadcast communicative events. All television programmes originate offscreen, with a production team responsible, inter alia, for orchestrating the onscreen conduct of performers. Some, but not all, performers belong to the production team, in that they carry the responsibility for successful production onscreen. In their relations 'outwards', to the television audience, these are 'presenters'; in the microcosm of the studio they are 'hosts'. Whether or not these labels are used in programme publicity, some such understanding structures a wide variety of programme types whilst allowing the presenter/host role to take on specific colourations according to the type of programme involved – master of ceremonies at awards shows, quizmasters for games shows, chairpersons for debates and so on.

The arguments for according *especial* significance to audience discussion programmes and other 'access' genres are presented in very condensed form in the final chapter. The authors argue, inter

alia, that the partial merging of game show and debate conventions in audience discussion programmes transcends the principle whereby market values and civic values (producing entertainment programming and serious programming respectively) are seen as being in opposition to one another (p. 179). This is but one of the ways in which the generic instability of such programmes can potentially produce critical knowledge, both of broadcasting conventions and of the social order itself. Thus the authors subsume the argument regarding the (problematic) opposition of civic and market values within a broader one; they theorize audience discussion programmes, in Habermasian terms, as encounters between 'the system' (market *and* polity) and 'the life world'. Such communication must be encouraged, for it 'establishes links between those realms and so potentially generates critical knowledge which could overcome the separation of these realms' (p. 180). It is not obvious in what sense the separation of system and lifeworld has to be *overcome*. Presumably the point is that critical knowledge should include some appreciation of the mutually determining relations between the system and lifeworld practices, but some further conceptual refinement would be useful here.

One very good feature of this book is that it includes a large amount of data, both extracts from programmes and from the audience material. This should make it a useful book to use with student groups, and should enable them to employ its terms and concepts in analysing fresh examples from their own television viewing.